

Redeemed Eros- by “Katrina”

In our society today the word eros is used exclusively to refer to lust. However, in Catholic thought, following the Greek use of the word, eros encompasses not only lust but also love of truth, beauty and of the divine.

We know that there are good and bad features of passionate love. My story is about an eros love that led to rejection but was finally redeemed by Christ.

Back when I was in college I met a young Catholic man, discerning priesthood. We shared the same circle of friends and even did some ministries together. Several men had been attracted to me but I had not felt the same way. But when I met this young man I felt something that I never felt before. He was tall, of Italian ancestry, with piercing blue eyes that took my breath away and made my entire body halt. When he spoke I truly felt that I was hearing the voice of God. He had such tenderness for those around him and yet such masculine authority. He was so captivating and amazing that he lit up my entire being. Whenever I saw him, I felt like my heart would sing. I could be having the most ordinary day but he would walk into the room where I was sitting, and it would feel like the first day of my life.

During the first few months that we knew each other I sensed that he might have had an attraction to me of some sort. To this day I am still not sure whether it was a romantic attraction or a spiritual one, but I do remember his eyes lighting up when he saw me. Let me explain. We would be in the same group of people and he would spend a lot of his time focusing on me and getting to know me. I started to feel like he felt that I was beautiful. It was completely bewildering to me that he could feel this way about me. Cool people did not affirm me in High School. And, yet he was the coolest of the cool. If I could secure this type of affirmation from him regularly, then maybe I could get over my childhood issues of not feeling good enough. All the people who did not affirm me in High School would be wrong because he would affirm me. In other words, I could depend on him to make me feel good about myself and I definitely started to feel this way.

Then I started to want more. Maybe he could heal me of all my childhood traumas. After all, if I could depend on him to feel good about myself, then maybe he could clean up the mess from my High School years. After all, he was cooler than the people who rejected me in High School. So, maybe I could manipulate him to affirm me even more than he already was. I wasn't thinking of this in terms of trying to get him to become my boyfriend. It was different. In the same way that a homeless person manipulates someone to give them food, so did I try to manipulate him to give me free, unlimited counseling. If I had psychological issues, which I most certainly did, then I figured that I could just throw it all on him, and let him handle it. I could cleave to him, and he would take care of me. My cross would be shared between him and me, probably with him doing most of the work. I could be a little girl and stay that way.

It should seem obvious that my passionate love for this young man became distorted. My once healthy natural admiration of him became an obsession. I started to feel this strong sense that I owned him. If he gave attention to someone, I felt like I allowed for it. Yes, I felt like the universe was asking me permission on whether or not it was okay with me. I actually felt like I

had the type of authority to say what was okay. Further, I convinced myself that I actually had a choice on whether to accept that he would give attention to others, when in reality I did not. Truly, I did not have any choice at all but to accept that he was not giving attention to me. In response, I found that I would do things that were desperate and sneaky to get his attention. I would dress in subtle ways, act aloof, boast while giving the impression of humility, etc.

The moments that I did not see him became occasions for preparing for the next time that I would see him. I would scheme and plan out different ways that I could get his attention.

My mantra was: if he thought that I was good enough, then surely I was good enough. I did not have a lot of happiness from relationships, but all this could be resolved if he just gave me love. After all, the opinions of others did not matter compared to his. In other words he became my Higher Power.

Needless to say, my strong attachment to him sent him moving in the other direction. Rather than getting more of his attention, I received complete and utter rejection. He began to avoid me, and keep conversations short with me whenever he saw me. I started to feel horrible about myself and wonder if there was something sincerely wrong with me. I was sent into a tail spin and started to think that maybe all those things that were said to me in High School were true. Maybe I was a loser, after all.

God's mercy is endless and His treasury of compassion is inexhaustible. He loves me so much, even as I am. But, he loved me too much to allow me to stay the way that I was. He inspired this man to reject me and not falter from it, no matter what I tried to do. For four months or more, he avoided me and would reject me every time that he saw me. In fact, I saw him purposely giving attention to others, especially women, as a way of showing me to back off. The rejection felt so horrible and it was so painfully consistent. I realized that the Lord wanted me to die and to die all the way with regard to my co-dependency, possessiveness and sin with regard to this situation.

I suffered horribly, and began to visit the adoration chapel as much as three times a day and sometimes even more. In addition, I would go to Co-dependency Anonymous meetings to deal with this obsession. In working the first three steps of the program, I began to realize that the only way to be set free and regain my dignity was to surrender him and myself to God. I began to do this regularly, and found myself praying for him often as a result. I would pray for his welfare, but most of all I pray for God's protection over him.

When I began to pray that the Lord protect him from me, I felt the gates of God's healing were beginning to open. They were not open all the way, but it was a start. By praying for God to protect him from me, I was getting in touch with a deeper love that I had for him. I wanted the best for him, even if it went against all of my desires. Of course, it would be wonderful if it was best for him to fulfill my desires. But, this was obviously not God's plan for him or me. He had something greater in mind for both of us.

As I began to pray for God's protection over him, I found that I was also praying for him in general. I would ask the Lord to bless him, make him a saint and nourish him both spiritually and emotionally. I would pray that he be given the strength to carry his cross, and that no one would ever be able to take it away from him. And, I would pray for him during the consecration

at Mass. It was a wonderful gift from God to be able to love him from afar, and I must say that I think that all my prayers were answered! The Lord protected him, blessed him with wonderful support emotionally and probably spiritually too and never was his cross taken from him. He had to renounce any possibility of marriage if he wanted to be a priest. I found out later that he was able to make that sacrifice. After his graduation he entered the seminary and has been a priest for ten years now.

Despite all my time at adoration and all my prayers, I felt like he still saw me as a crazy person. He had no idea that the Lord was giving authentic love for him and I was slowly letting go of the obsession. How could he know this, though? Well, I expected that he was psychic and should just realize it. He wasn't, of course. So, I had moved in a positive direction but he continued to treat me as if I had not. This experience became very painful and I did not know how to handle it.

Finally, I started to discuss my concerns with priests on campus. I would tell them about the situation, and found that they were very loving and nonjudgmental about it. In fact, I felt like a normal person who was having a normal human experience. I learned that the Lord was calling me to a closer relationship to Him.

Anyway, I started to feel like some of the ice was melting but that there was still some stuff that needed to be dealt with. I had kept it inside for so long, but now felt that the Lord was telling me that it would be okay to share it with a priest. This priest knew the young man. I did not plan to tell him, though. It started when we were praying in a circle and he picked up that I was feeling a certain way. I spoke with him after the prayer and he took all the time that I needed. I felt loved and like he truly valued me and cared. He began to pray over me for all the inner healing that I needed. He told me that I was a worthy daughter of God by virtue of Jesus Christ. This made me cry. I always knew that I was loved, but never knew that God found me worthy. But at that moment I knew that He did. Then, the prayer ended and we stepped into another room to talk. He seemed to sense that more might be going on and he asked me about it.

I told this priest everything about my attraction to this man and the shame that I felt for having had it. After sharing it, I instantly felt better and like I was prepared to share it with the man I had been obsessing over. I arranged for a way to meet with him, and told him everything. Everything that I ever felt, the co-dependency anonymous group, etc. I shared with him that I had surrendered this young man to Mary, and that I would not bother him ever again. He was in my prayers, however, and nothing could get in the way of this.

I felt complete relief and knew, at that moment, that I was ready to share this with the young man. He agreed to meet with me. I proceeded to tell him everything I ever felt for him and all the prayers I had chosen to say for his protection and my own. I shared with him all the work I had done in my program and that it was my strongest desire that he become a holy priest. He was so impressed by my brutal honesty, self-examination and prayers for him that I saw a look of complete relief come over him. I could tell that he felt empowered by my attraction to him and loved by my willingness to surrender him to Mary. He thanked me and expressed his gratitude for my talking with the other priest about it. After this, we parted ways gracefully. I told him that I loved him and he said that he loved me as well. I am assuming that he meant it in

a spiritual way.

After this conversation, we started to see each other again on campus usually in groups of friends. Although he and I would not talk one-on-one, we enjoyed being in the same group and there was no tension any longer. He knew that I loved him, and I realize now that this is all that I really wanted all along. "Rejection is God's protection" as they say. I do feel that God had a higher calling for both him and me. We are not meant to be together, though it's possible that we may have a spiritual friendship someday. I'm not holding my breath after all that happened, though. At this point, it's best to keep distance and thank God for the positive outcome.

If this experience has shown me one thing, it is that passionate love is beautiful and can be a doorway to deeper types of Christian love. I am not afraid of my passions after this experience because I have realized that they can truly be consecrated to God, but I have to make the choice. When I do choose to give my passion for human beings to God, He will give back to me what is fruitful about it without my having to hold onto what is not fruitful about it.

Passionate love brings fire into my otherwise gray, mundane world. My imagination is ignited. I become more creative and interesting because I am so motivated and inspired to move forward in my walk with Christ. I feel a zest for life and like a door is open for being fully alive, in the way that God created me to be. I am grateful that I don't need to be afraid of my passions. Rather, I can have access to them on God's terms and for His glory.