

Things to Consider

- ▶ Find a quiet place and spend some time just looking at the photo on the front. (You could also download a copy from the Internet.) What do *you* see? What do *you* notice? (Perhaps there is another object of art or sculpture that moves you deeply. If so, in what way?)
- ▶ Could you see yourself as Adam?
- ▶ Do you truly believe that God loves you, that God is passionate about you? If you do, what do you need to do next? Equally, if you don't, what do you need to do next?
- ▶ Love is a word that is bandied around in our society to the extent that it has almost become meaningless. In an essay the theologian James Alison wondered whether the word 'like' might not bring more of a response from us. His question was, 'Do think God *likes* you?' So, do you? (It has been suggested to me that the word *like* has also been emptied of meaning because of Facebook. It was suggested the Biblical word *kindness* as an alternative, for it affirms care, imagination and challenge. So the question then might be: 'Do you think that God looks on you with a sense of kindness?')
- ▶ Spend some time thinking about those parables referred to in the text in Luke 15 – the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son. How might they relate to your life? What might they be saying to you?
- ▶ Read these verses from *The Song of Songs* in the Old Testament: 2.8–12,16. The One who is 'the beloved' is God who seeks this soul which is you. A psalm that might help you deepen your passion for God is 42.1–2 Try saying these verses quietly, slowly, repeatedly, and with feeling. See it as a personal conversation between you and God. Use it over the course of a week or so, on a daily basis.

Photo on front cover:

'Christ and Adam'

North Porch, Chartres Cathedral

B2/12/MBH



'The
Great
Lover'

Sooner or later every small child asks their parents, 'Do you love me?' It may not be spoken, and may not even be formulated as a question, but it's there in the eyes of the child. And how terrible it is when a child discovers that the answer is 'No', and how wonderful it is when a child realises that they are deeply and passionately loved. With the latter – they will go forward in life, secure, happy and trusting; with the former – there will always be something missing from their life, and depending on the circumstances, they will struggle at the emotional level.

I suspect most human beings ask this same question of God: 'Do you love me?' Again, it may not be formulated as a question, but it is still there.

I want to say the answer is a resounding 'Yes!' There may be those who say the answer is 'No', and though I would strongly disagree with them, I don't wish to explore it here, but leave it to other brochures.

Tragically, at times through the centuries, many people have focused on the wrath of God and so God has become for them something of a bully or dictator. It has been more a relationship of fear: 'Step out of line and you will be punished.' (Proverbs 1.7 does say that 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge', but this is not so much about fear as such, but, recognising who we are and who God is; that is remembering our place in creation). This is not to say there is not judgement in our relationship with God, but it is not a good place to start.

I would suggest to you that God is 'The Great Lover' who loves you passionately, to an extent you can't begin to imagine, in the same way that a small child cannot comprehend the passion and love their parents have for them.

Look at the photo on the cover of this handout which was drawn to my attention. It shows a stone statue of Christ and Adam in the North Porch of Chartres Cathedral and is indeed very beautiful. Look at the figure of Christ gently holding Adam with one hand and caressing him with the other.

Notice how Adam sits at his feet with one hand on Christ's knee and seems happy just to be there. It is an image of deep love and contentment.

Could you see yourself in the place of Adam?

If you can, what might that be saying about your journey of faith and your relationship with God? if you can't, what might that also be saying? Spend some time thinking about this. You might want to talk to your priest or some other person about this.

God does love you passionately – think of those parables in Luke 15: the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. In fact the latter would best be called the parable of the Profligate Father. A middle-aged Jewish father running across a field with arms outstretched to welcome home a wayward son, was simply unheard of and beneath his dignity, particularly when the son had previously asked for and been given his inheritance. In effect this son had said to him, 'I wish you were dead'. And yet this is the image of God's passionate love for us as portrayed in the parable, despite the son's behaviour.

There is nothing you can do to stop God loving you. He is the Great Lover. He may not always be happy with what you do, He may not be happy with what you have become and what you are doing with your life. But he will not stop loving you. Could you, as a parent, ever stop loving your child? You may be able to think of situations where you would, but I do not believe that this is possible with God, for it would mean that His love is limited and by definition that cannot be true.

One thing to note with the photo is that Adam, in the position where he sits, does not see Christ. He simply trusts that He is there. And that is true for us as well. As with Moses, who only sees the back side of God as He passes (Exodus 33.19–23), so too with us. We can ever only see the traces of God after the event. We simply have to trust in the love and goodness God has for us.