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## For a special teacher

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Recollecting Fr. John Prabhu S.J.'s thoughts on the power of love



As a student of a well-reputed management institute (several years ago), I had a teacher — a fine man named Fr. John Prabhu S.J.

One day, as I walked with him to the park, I was worried and anxious, unable to cope with my lessons and the complexity of the subjects I was studying. He held my hand and told me, “If you do not love, you die.” I did not understand what he meant by those words. It was only a couple of days ago when I happened to watch the movie Tuesdays with Morrie, where these words were said by the dying teacher, that I was struck by the enormity of Fr. Prabhu’s words.

Love is a cascading emotion, not a touchy-feely one that most people make it out to be. Love, Fr. Prabhu told me, “melts, dissolves and ultimately helps neutralise all forms of pain”.

In my case, as a student who was consumed by anxiety and fear, love, he said, “would dispel anxiety and restore confidence. In loving yourself, you tend to believe in your own self-worth and goodness, and such powerful thoughts drive away niggling doubt. Love in relationships, where you give without recompense, binds, fosters and cements the association. Love in work distances ennui and frustration and helps us cherish whatever we are doing”.

In a world where we have little time to stop and stare, Fr. Prabhu would remind me of the number of ways in which life touches us; yet we do not acknowledge its force and presence. He told me a story which has stayed with me all these years:

A devotee once looked heavenward and beseeched his maker saying, “Lord, I wish to see you.” No sooner did he utter these words than there was lightning. The devotee got scared and hid in the shade of a tree. He then said, “Lord, I wish to hear you.” Shortly thereafter, there was thunder and the devotee ran for shelter. He then said, “Lord touch me” and immediately a little mosquito alighted on his shoulder. And he swatted it away.

Fr. Prabhu told me that life visits us in ways for which we are unprepared, and while we yearn for such visitations, we turn away from them. Life does not come to you the way you want it to, nor does it offer you only the gifts you think you deserve. In fact, life constantly showers you with generosity, but we do not savour this nor do we accept it with grace.

I parted ways with my teacher after graduating, and met him many years later, shortly before he passed away owing to Parkinson's disease. His mind was sharp though his movements were slow. He held my hand and said, "How would you like people to remember you when you are gone?" I said, "I want to be remembered as a good person." He replied, "Why wait to die to be remembered as such? Be the good person you want to be here and now." These words I have savoured and treasured since then..

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