

*The True Love* (Heb 2:14)

\* Today it is still in the air: - the Christmas festivity and family gatherings with warmth; - the tune of carols; - the holiday cheer; - the joy of giving and the joy of receiving. If thinking specifically with regard to gifts we have ever received on our birthdays or Christmases, or any other memorial occasions, then the gift we might have received from God is quite different from all imaginable gifts we've ever gotten. Those of you who gathered at St. Luke's on Christmas Eve heard the old-old story about the self-giving love of our God in giving to us the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. Actually, the subject of self-giving love was broadly displayed apart of Scripture as well, especially in literature and arts. In fact, the most well-known works in literature and arts were made by people who were influenced upon hearing the same old-old story. Surely this old story gave birth the many other stories, including this one, titled "The Nightingale and the Rose," written by Oscar Wilde, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish poet and dramatist. I believe upon hearing "The Nightingale and the Rose," you will easily recognize the source from which this story came. In addition, you will see that Oscar's story may provoke anger or shame depending on individuals. Here is the shortened paraphrase of Oscar's fable I made a few years ago.

\* It might have happened somewhere in England, two hundred years ago. There was a young student who fell in love with a pretty girl, the daughter of a famous professor. It tells that one night the students, faculty and friends were invited to a big party, where musicians would play on their magical instruments and good looking ladies would elegantly dance with their suitors. *Oh!*, cried the young Student, *she said, if I bring her a red rose she will be my sweetheart, but there is no way to find any roses in the early spring. There is not one red rose in all the land!*, he said as his eyes filled with tears. Meanwhile the Nightingale, who was in the oak tree, heard the boy and considered what the boy had in mind. *If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me*, said the student, *I will hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is not even one rose, so I am lost and nothing can help me*, and he threw himself down on the grass, and wept. *Here at last is one who loved truly*, said the Nightingale. He noticed that passion had made the boy's face as pale as ivory, and sorrow had set its seal upon his eyes. *Here indeed is one who loved truly, I have to help him*, said the Nightingale, and he flew to look for a rose. Finally, he found one magic rose bush, but the cost for its rose was extremely high. As the bird was told,

he should sing the song of love throughout the night and willingly spear his heart with a rose thorn and give his blood to the rose-bush so that the bush could give birth to the rose. Once the decision had been made, the Nightingale cried, *Be happy, be happy; you shall have your red rose. I'll build it out of the music of my mouth, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you love truly.*

\* When darkness had come upon the earth, the Nightingale flew to the Rose bush, and set his breast against the thorn. All night long he sang with his breast against the thorn, the thorn went deeper and deeper into the breast, and his lifeblood ebbed away. At that moment there was one witness, the cold, crystal Moon, it leaned down and listened. All night long the tiny bird sang a song. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew the birdsong; for he sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, the Love that was not left in a tomb. In the end a marvelous rose was born. It became crimson, like the roses of Lebanon with a crimson girdle of petals, and as crimson as a ruby was the heart of the giver. *Look, look!* cried the Moon, *the rose is finished now;* but the Nightingale made no answer, for he was gone.

In the morning, the Student opened his window and looked out. The red rose in the front of his window amazed him with its beauty. *Wow! What a wonderful piece of luck!* he cried; and he leaned down and plucked the beautiful rose. Then he ran up to the Professor's house with the rose in his hand. The girl of his desire was sitting in the doorway when the Student came into her view. *I brought you a red rose,* he cried. *Just look here, isn't it the reddest rose in the world would you like to have it? It should make you the most beautiful lady of the party, and when we dance together it will tell everybody how much I love you. I am afraid, it will not match with my dress,* said the girl, *and, besides, the Chamberlain's nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers. Well, to say the least, you are very ungrateful,* said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into a gutter. Soon after, the wagon's wheels melted the beautiful rose with dirt.

\* Friends, in what way do you think this fiction can be understood, if it would be influenced by the old-old story of the self-giving love of our God? Well, to build a house the constructors need to plan ahead. Now we ask God for knowledge and understanding for the construction he calls us to build. Please join me in prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for the priceless gift I received through faith in Your only begotten Son Jesus

Christ. I acknowledge receiving this gift as you forgave my sins; come into my heart and set it free from fear, protect me constantly; give me one share with all Saints; and many give me other blessings including the hope for the life everlasting. In response to this great love to me, I wish to set my mind and heart in opposition to worldly things, help me do this O Lord. Pluck from me all love of the world and of sin. Destroy in me all love for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye. Then I will walk in the way of righteousness and in the paths of justice because of you, O Lord; the most holy, righteous and merciful, One God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

\* Again thinking over the nature of God, the first idea I came across with says that God is omnipotent, without limit to create everything. Next, I think of God as the One who has a sense of absolute righteousness and who is the practitioner of all righteousness. Then I recall that our God is merciful and just in all His ways. Finally I am memorizing the verse from (1Jh 4:16) it says,... *God is love...* Friends, do you believe that all these characteristics belong to God? I am sure you do. And if it so, then let's build a statement using our beliefs in an orderly way as I recalled them to you. As far as God was accepted in such a way that He is without limit and can make everything, then we have believed that He was born from a virgin and became God-man Jesus. Because He is absolute righteousness, God-man Jesus didn't commit any transgression or sins. Then by virtue of his merciful character, he voluntarily gave himself as a perfect sacrifice covering the transgressions of the entire world by his blood, and satisfied God' justice forever. By his very acts, God revealed his love to us in God-man Jesus who himself is the Embodied Love of God; the incomparable precious, priceless and beautiful gift. Then, why do you think many people rejected the Embodied Love if not by their mouths but by their very acts?

\* The answer comes as we consider more carefully what was said by the tiny bird from "The Nightingale and The Rose." He said, *All that I ask of you in return is that you love **truly**.* We know that true love is shown when a man sacrifices himself for someone's sake. I knew a man who gave one of his kidneys to his sick daughter. I also knew a prosperous man who didn't give a hand, even a little, to his only and honest son when indeed he was in need. Those who belong to this world usually love a master whose name is "Money," likewise is the professor's daughter from the fable. On the other hand, there are some persons whom the Scripture symbolically calls pigs and dogs, (Mat 7:6) And they can be identified as one company with the student who treated the priceless gift as garbage.

\* Finally, we arrive at the end of the old-old story. It says that the Embodied Love was believed and accepted by many. The Book of Acts says that thousands of men and women repented, and they were baptized for Christ's sake giving themselves as living sacrifices, (Act 2:41). Yesterday the Church commemorated St. Stephen. You should know his story, (Act 7:1-60). He was stoned to death outside Jerusalem some time after the Crucifixion. The Scripture says that during his execution he was praying for the benefits of his murderers. In the critical moment Stephen's attitude demonstrated how it works; after taking His roots in Stephen's heart, the Embodied Love brought forth another beautiful red-red rose. In the same way He works in the hearts of others; He takes His roots and then He gives birth as much as a person can bear, the beautiful-beautiful red roses.

Beloved, grace and mercy to you in brining force the fruits of life.

Amen