

"Monkeys will always turn on you," the zookeeper told me as my daughter and I threw a banana toward Barney the monkey. "It doesn't matter if you raise him from the time he's a baby. A monkey might act like your best friend until he really wants something, then he will turn on you." Obviously he was speaking from experience, and I had a feeling that he was referring specifically to the monkey that Sonja and I were feeding. Maybe this man had raised Barney, only to see Barney turn on him. It probably made the poor zookeeper wonder if all the time and affection he had spent on Barney had been worth it.

I guess it shouldn't be a surprise that Barney would turn out to be selfish. He's an animal, after all, and animals are selfish by nature. Even a dog's loyalty and affection is based on what the dog thinks he/she can get in return. And it's been that way ever since Adam and Eve brought sin into the world.

It makes you wonder: how many of the "loving acts" that we perform are really selfish acts? If we give a gift, don't we expect to be thanked? If we host someone for dinner, don't we expect them to reciprocate? If we compliment somebody's appearance, don't we hope they do the same for us in return? So many of the nice things that we do are based on the assumption that we're going to receive something nice in return. We decide to whom we are going to give our affections based on what we think we will get back from them.

Thank God that he never waited for us to give love to him before he showed us love! God sent his Son to bear our burden of sin while we were still sinners, while we were still unable to show him love.

But now we can show love. Real love. Selfless love. As the apostle John says, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We show that love first of all toward God in the way we treat his Word and Sacraments. They become for us the most important part of our lives as we cherish the connection they maintain between God and ourselves.

We can also show that love toward other people. In our homes, we carry out our responsibilities as acts of love, whether or not we receive any acknowledgment for all we do. In our community, we look for ways to serve those who need our help, whether or not such people can do anything for us in return. And when we help people, we always keep in mind their greatest need: to know the forgiving love of their Savior Jesus Christ.

By God's grace we don't have to be like Barney the monkey. Praise God that he has met your greatest need! Ask him to help you reflect his love toward others.

Prayer: Dear God, you are love. Too often I take your love for granted and fail to appreciate the many blessings you give ever single day. But still you love me. Thank you for every chance you give me to share your love with others. When I have the chance to show your love through words, help me find the right words to speak. When I have the chance to show your love through actions, help me do so in the spirit of selflessness that caused you to send your Son to bleed and die for me. In his name I pray, Amen.

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