
“I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change!”

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

Valentine’s Day and Ash Wednesday?

About twenty years ago, a musical comedy appeared off Broadway with the rather brilliant title, “I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change,” with words and lyrics by Joe DiPietro. For me, it is still one of the great titles of all time, because no one needs to have actually seen the musical in order to appreciate the phrase! “I love you, you’re perfect, now change.” Ha!

I thought of that line this past Sunday while listening to Canon Wallace Marsh preach a sermon that I especially liked, on change and love and loss. (You can find the sermon [here](#).) Well, I also admit that another reason I loved his remarks was that he mentioned me! He said that I was a great fan of the quotation of John Henry Cardinal Newman, “to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.”

Yes, I am a happy proponent of that truth. Living, inevitably, involves change. In fact, I tell people further: “the only things that are not changing are dead.”

I preached a sermon back in 2011, titled, “I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change.” (You can read it [here](#).) During this week, when Valentine’s Day collided with Ash Wednesday, it is worth reflecting more on that delightful phrase.

Yes, the phrase describes the way we love one another. Any one of us who has ever been in love knows that our love for another person develops in stages. The first stage, inevitably, is about ourselves. Yes, about ourselves. The first flush of love is usually something inside ourselves. We are aware of desire. Something rises up in us, some rush of hormones or adrenaline; and we call it love.

The next stage, often immediately following the first, is about the object of our desire. “Wow,” we say, “You are perfect. You are the very ideal of perfection. Not a blemish on you!” Now, if we are on the receiving end of love, we really like that stage. Someone is calling us “perfect.” That feels pretty good! Someone has actually been able to look beyond our faults and been able to call us “perfect.” We tend to start believing that projection.

Then. Then ... the third stage. First stage: I love you. Second stage: you’re perfect. But third stage: now change. Any of us who has ever been in love knows what this stage means, too. Yes, I love you. Yes, you are wonderful. But, the way you do such and such really has begun to bug me. In fact, it has always bugged me. Can’t you change that habit? And what about that other boring thing you do...? And that disgusting thing...? Do you realize you are always...? Grow up! Change! I love you. You’re perfect. Now change.

Well, on Ash Wednesday, and during Lent, God might be saying a similar thing to us. But God would say, “I love you, you are being perfected, now change.” For, when God calls us to be perfect, God is really calling us to “be perfected.” We are on our way somewhere with God, on a journey. God has an “end” for us. The Greeks called it a “telos.” We are meant to be growing toward the goal of union with God.

But that journey requires change! There is no way to grow, and no way to grow in love, without changing. And there is

certainly no way to grow towards God without changing. Some of that change is inevitable (“to live is to change”), and so the Church, in her wisdom, offers us grace during those inevitable and momentous changes in life: birth (baptism), illness, marriage, and death (funerals). The pastoral offices of the Church are meant to touch those inevitable changes of life with God’s grace.

Note well the pastoral services of the Church! We are here to touch one another with grace during the changes of life. In fact, one of my other descriptions of the role of the Church is that “the Church is supposed to show us how to change gracefully.”

The Church further invites us to live through change in the more routine liturgical services of the church. Our weekly Eucharist invites us to change. Our daily confession of sin invites us to change.

And, you know what? Our valentines invite us to change, too. I mean, our lovers invite us to change, too. And God is the one who loves us most. If you missed Valentine’s Day, there is still time. If you missed Ash Wednesday, there is still time. To live is to change, and to love is to change, daily, towards the glory of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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