

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort from The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's community comment.

I was born one Valentine's Day, long ago. As that holiday comes and goes each year I take note of the various ways people use and misuse the word "love" and I am often appalled at how little thought such an important subject usually gets.

One of the great weaknesses of the English language is its tendency to use a single word to attempt to capture the range of definition encompassed by other languages. Our twisting of the word "love" is perhaps the most egregious violation. I certainly love my wife and I also love pizza, yet the two are hardly equal in spite of the same word describing both emotional states.

The Ancient Greeks were better equipped in this area. They identified several different categories of feeling and used words with broader meanings to try to capture them.

First is *eros*, sensual love; that warmth which grows in your gut as you contemplate something you have a craving for, be it warm chocolate syrup on cold ice cream or the attractive person who just walked through your line of sight. Our Western tendency to sexualize this love (because it certainly includes that physicality) is a reflection of our difficulty understanding a word or idea which is more fluid in meaning than our own language permits.

*Phileo* (or *Philia*, if you prefer) is a companion love. It is affection between dear friends, the love of those who associate together without reservation, and the basis for the name "Philadelphia," the city of brotherly love. It is loyalty, a sense of community and belonging. You may not know the man in the seat beside you at that sporting event, but you are both wearing the same color jersey because you *philia* him and he *philia* you as well, leading to endless opportunities for uncomfortable puns, though I will refrain. *Phileo* is also the abiding connection between lovers even after the initial passion and *eros* may have passed.

*Storge* is the love of family for one another, particularly the unbreakable bond between a parent and child. It reflects a natural affection, even perhaps an obligation or compulsion to be

connected to those who are related to you. It is the call of blood to blood or adopted family to one another. It is "the natural movement of the soul for husband, wife, child, or dog," according to one commentator who was apparently not a cat person.

Then there is *agape* (or in the active use: *agapeo*). This is not an emotion, but a decision. The Greeks called it the noblest of loves. It connotes an esteem, a caring, a decision to ascribe value to someone regardless of ought else. It is not kindled by merit, worth, or identity, but is a choice made to "will the good of another" (Aquinas). *Agape* is a decision to place the good of others as your utmost priority.

It is this willful decision to love which should direct our actions towards one another. I'm not always great at it myself, for which I apologize. Tell you what. I'll try to love – *agape* – those around me and you try to *agape* those around you and let's see if the world changes, even just a little bit, between now and the end of next month. If we all give this a try, I bet it will.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with today's KINS Community Comment.