

CHRISTMAS AT CHRISTENDOM

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“A Father’s Love: Matthew’s Christmas Gift in *Anne of Green Gables*”

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A lady shopkeeper is not as menacing as a hungry lion in his den, but Matthew Cuthbert would rather face the lion. Shy, sixty-year-old farmer Matthew is a quiet character in Lucy Maud Montgomery’s book *Anne of Green Gables*, published in 1908, but like the quiet carpenter St. Joseph, Matthew’s presence makes a powerful impact on those around him. Modeling the virtues of St. Joseph, Matthew’s love for Anne offers a place of protection and rest, guides her in humility and obedience, and exemplifies courage and perseverance, especially when he faces a lion – that is, when he buys a Christmas dress for Anne. A man of few words and of great love, Matthew’s quiet presence in the story reveals both St. Joseph’s care as the foster father of Jesus to provide for and protect him, as well as our Heavenly Father’s unconditional love and desire to lead us to eternal happiness.

Lucy Maud Montgomery’s story begins with the elderly Matthew Cuthbert and his sister Marilla having decided one Christmas to adopt a young boy to help Matthew on their Prince Edward Island farm, yet a miscommunication led to a meeting that would change their lives forever. In this talk, I focus on Matthew’s gift of fatherly love towards his adopted daughter Anne. Yet love also softens the no-nonsense Marilla, surprises the skeptical neighbor Mrs. Rachel Lynde, brings wonder to Anne’s friend Diana, and challenges the heart and mind of schoolboy Gilbert Blythe. Although the primary focus is on Matthew, with brief mentions of the others, Montgomery’s book depicts the transformative and nourishing nature of love for many in

the story – and, indeed, we readers of the story may also find that our hearts brighten as we contemplate the gifts of love given and received by the characters who fill the pages of *Anne of Green Gables*.

To see how Matthew Cuthbert offers a place of protection and rest for the eleven-year-old orphan Anne Shirley, let us keep in mind the model of St. Joseph. Pope Leo XIII said, “In [St.] Joseph ... heads of the household are blessed with the unsurpassed model of fatherly watchfulness and care.”¹ Matthew’s watchfulness and care is exemplified in his initial encounter with Anne, although, at first, *he* seems to be the one in need of protection.

Arriving at the train station the next summer to pick up the expected orphan boy, Matthew discovers that the orphanage had sent a little girl instead. Painfully shy Matthew realizes he must do “that which was harder for him than bearding a lion in its den—walk up to a girl—a strange girl—an orphan girl—and demand of her why she wasn’t a boy.”² Yet as soon as they meet, Matthew forgets about himself in recognizing that *she* is the one in need of protection. The thin, young red-haired girl brightly tells him:

“I suppose you are Mr. Matthew Cuthbert of Green Gables? [Mrs. Spencer said you would be coming for me, but]... I had made up my mind that if you didn’t come for me to-night, I’d go down the track to that big wild cherry-tree at the bend, and climb up into it to stay all night. I wouldn’t be a bit afraid, and it would be lovely to sleep in a wild cherry-tree all white with bloom in the moonshine, don’t you think?” (11-12)

¹ Pope Leo XIII, <https://www.stjosephourguide.org/understanding-st-joseph/>

² Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1998), 11. All future citations will be given parenthetically by page number.

Although the little girl seems eager to spend the night in a cherry tree, Matthew knows he cannot leave her alone and abandoned. Like St. Joseph, who knew he must protect Mary and find a place to stay in Bethlehem on that cold December night, Matthew's response is one of watchfulness and care: he immediately offers to carry Anne's bag and leads her to the carriage to take her home. Despite knowing of his sister Marilla's disapproval and despite the fear of sharing a carriage ride with a strange girl, Matthew rises above his own fears to act for her good.

On the carriage ride to his house, Green Gables, Matthew accepts and validates Anne just as she is, even if it is a bit overwhelming for him. Anne's chatter streams forth in a dizzying fashion as they drive by blossoming cherry trees on the red roads of the island. Anne tells Matthew, all in one burst:

"This Island is the bloomiest place. I just love it already and I'm so glad I'm going to live here. I've always heard that Prince Edward Island was the prettiest place in the world, and I used to imagine I was living here, but I never really expected I would. It's delightful when your imaginations come true, isn't? But those red roads are so funny. When we got into the train at Charlottetown and the red roads began to flash past, I asked Mrs. Spencer what made them red, and she said she didn't know and for pity's sake not to ask her any more questions. She said I must have asked her a thousand already. I supposed I must had, too, but how are you going to find out about things if you don't ask questions? And what *does* make the roads red? ... Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there are to find out about? It just makes me feel glad to be alive – it's such an interesting world. It wouldn't be half so interesting if we knew all about everything would it?" (15)

Although Matthew "felt as he had once felt in his rash youth when another boy had enticed him on the merry-go-round at a picnic" (17), he does not stop her exuberance; instead, Matthew

offers her a protective shelter of caring attention on the carriage ride to Green Gables. Moreover, he gives her a rare gift. For when Anne worries that she is troubling Matthew, asking him, “Am I talking too much? People are always telling me I do. Would you rather I didn’t talk? If you say so, I’ll stop. I *can* stop when I make up my mind to it, although it’s difficult” (15), Matthew peacefully replies, “Oh, you can talk as much as you like. I don’t mind” (16). No one had ever before given Anne such a welcome haven of rest.

Shuffled among foster homes and orphanages for the past ten years, Anne had endured neglect, ill-treatment, and indifference. Treated as less than a servant in many of these places, Anne comes to believe that she is only loveable if she is useful or beautiful or accomplished in some way. Yet simply by listening to Anne, giving her his complete attention, delighting in her words – even if they did make him feel a bit dizzy – Matthew shows that she is loveable as she is. His watchfulness and care on the carriage ride as they drive home to Green Gables reveals both St. Joseph’s attentive care for Mary and the Child Jesus, and our Heavenly Father’s unconditional love in coming to us where we are in the world, to guide us to our eternal home.

Matthew continues to serve as a source of protective care for Anne when they arrive at Green Gables and face Marilla’s intense displeasure at the mix-up. Marilla sternly states that they cannot keep the girl, telling Anne: “We want a boy to help Matthew on the farm. A girl would be of no use to us” (25-26). Anne’s heart sinks into the “depths of despair” (26) when realizing that, once more, she is not wanted. Yet, seeing Anne’s tears and inability to eat the supper Marilla had placed before Anne, Matthew steps in, uncharacteristically contradicting his sister, telling her to let Anne rest and to decide everything in the morning. Matthew’s few words, “I guess she’s tired. ... Best put her to bed, Marilla” (26), reveal his fatherly desire to offer Anne a place of protection and rest. Then, after Marilla returns to the kitchen, still insisting that Anne must be sent back to

the orphanage, Matthew offers one of the most powerful lines in the book. Here is the passage in full:

“Well, this is a pretty kettle of fish,” [Marilla] said wrathfully. “This is what comes of sending word instead of going ourselves. Robert Spencer’s folks have twisted that message somehow. One of us will have to drive over and see Mrs. Spencer tomorrow, that’s certain. This girl will have to be sent back to the [orphan] asylum.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” said Matthew reluctantly.

“You *suppose* so! Don’t you know it?”

“Well now, she’s a real nice little thing, Marilla. It’s kind of a pity to send her back when she’s so set on staying here.”

“Matthew Cuthbert, you don’t mean to say you think we ought to keep her!” ...

“Well now, no, I suppose not – not exactly,” stammered Matthew, uncomfortably driven into a corner for his precise meaning. “I suppose – we could hardly be expected to keep her.”

“I should say not. What good would she be to us?”

“We might be some good to her,” said Matthew, suddenly, and unexpectedly. (28-29)

That one sentence: “We might be some good to her” articulates Matthew’s innate fatherly love that wants to protect Anne not only from the physical danger of neglectful orphanages and sleeping in cherry trees, but more essentially, from the spiritual danger of finding herself abandoned as an unloved orphan once again. He offers selfless love and mercy to the girl. Matthew’s words seem an echo of Christ’s own words in the Gospels when the disciples had spoken “sternly to those who brought [the children to Jesus], but Jesus said, ‘Let the children

come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs”” (Matthew 19: 13-14).

Knowing of Matthew’s desire to keep Anne, Marilla soon realizes that she, too, cannot abandon Anne nor deny her their home. Marilia decides to raise Anne as best as she can, telling Matthew not to interfere with her methods, not to “put his oar in” (48). In reply, Matthew offers calm words of wisdom to his sister: “There, there, Marilla, you can have your own way. ... Only be as good and as kind to her as you can be without spoiling her. I kind of think she’s one of the sort you can do anything with if you only get her to love you” (48). Matthew’s words reveal the traits of love as stated by St. Paul to the Corinthians: “Love is patient, love is kind” (1 Corinthians 13: 4). His words also echo St. Augustine’s claim, “Love God, and do what you will.” Indeed, God our Father asks us to love Him – to love one another as ourselves – with selfless patience, kindness, mercy, and with that love, all things are possible: even quiet, set-in-their-ways elderly siblings can survive the wild turmoil of bringing an energetic, imaginative orphan girl into their home.

As the days and years go by on Prince Edward Island, Matthew’s fatherly love continues to nourish and help Anne grow, modeling St. Joseph’s virtues of humility and obedience. St. Josemaría Escrivá says it best when he describes St. Joseph’s virtues:

St. Joseph was an ordinary sort of man on whom God relied on to do great things. He did exactly what the Lord wanted him to do, in each and every event that went to make up his life. That is why Scripture praises Joseph as “a just man.” And in Hebrew a just man means a good and faithful servant of God, someone who fulfills the divine will, or who is honorable and charitable toward his neighbor.”³

³ St. Josemaría Escrivá, <https://www.stjosephourguide.org/understanding-st-joseph/>

These virtues of Matthew Cuthbert served as a needed model for Anne to practice forbearance and humble obedience, especially towards her neighbor.

For soon after Anne's arrival to Green Gables, the Cuthbert's outspoken neighbor Mrs. Rachel Lynde visits to check on the new orphan. Mrs. Lynde's forthright candor does not sit well with sensitive Anne. Mrs. Lynde critiques Anne as a "terribly skinny, homely little thing" with "such freckles" and hair "as red as carrots," which causes Anne's temper to flash to its height, as she cries out that Mrs. Lynde is a "rude, impolite, unfeeling woman!" before dashing up to her room in tears (65). Marilla's demand for Anne to apologize to Mrs. Lynde falls upon deaf ears, for Anne's injured feelings causes her to stubbornly refuse to make amends. It is Matthew who calms Anne's suffering soul by modeling humility and encouraging obedience. Waiting until Marilla left the house to bring the cows in,

Matthew... crept upstairs. As a general thing Matthew gravitated between the kitchen and the little bedroom off the hall where he slept; once in a while he ventured uncomfortably into the parlor or sitting room when the minister came to tea. But he had never been upstairs in his own house since the spring he helped Marilla paper the spare bedroom, and that was four years ago. (71)

It is an ordinary action to walk upstairs, in his own house, but to this quiet farmer, this act is extraordinary when seen with the words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: "Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them."⁴

Love for Anne motivates Matthew to walk upstairs for the first time in four years, to knock on Anne's door, and to encourage her to apologize to Mrs. Lynde. The thought of

⁴ St. Thérèse of Lisieux, <https://www.littleflower.org/st-therese/>

humbling herself does not please Anne, nor does she want to obey Marilla's command. Yet after thinking about Matthew's words, Anne replied, "I suppose I could do it, to oblige you. ... I just couldn't think of going and telling Mrs. Lynde [that I was sorry, because] it would be so humiliating. ... But still – I'd do anything for you – if you really want me to – " (72). Matthew shows Anne that true humility is recognizing our right relationship with others – our neighbors, and especially with God; we are meant to be in communion, not conflict, with them. Seeing Anne's sensitivity and also pride, Matthew guides her to choose the humble path of communion instead of the proud path of solitude. In Matthew's example we can see the humble St. Joseph, who never succumbed to pride, yet immediately obeyed when told by an angel to take Mary as his wife or to flee into Egypt. Matthew's love guides Anne to do what is right even when it is difficult. Anne's decision to apologize, then, is an act of love, and it brings her peace: as she walked back with Marilla from Mrs. Lynde's house, Anne says, "I have no hard feelings against Mrs. Lynde now. It gives you a lovely, comfortable feeling to apologize, and be forgiven, doesn't it?" (76). Joy and peace are the results of obedience.

In another instance, Matthew's loving guidance helps Anne to temper her impulsive acts and excessive imagination. Anne had decided to act out Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott," which led to her almost drowning in a river, due to the leaky boat that she was floating in as she recited the poem about the unfortunate Lily Maid. Upon returning to Green Gables, soaked to the skin and repentant, Marilla reprimanded Anne for indulging in such romantic foolishness. Yet Matthew, extremely relieved that Anne was safely home, "laid a hand on Anne's shoulder... 'Don't give up all your romance, Anne,' he whispered shyly, 'a little of it is a good thing—not too much, of course—but keep a little of it, Anne, keep a little of it'" (228).

Matthew's gentle correction reveals his relief that Anne had not come to harm, while also showing that he does not want her to change into another kind of person by shutting down her romantic imagination, but rather, to temper it with prudence, using it in the right time, place, and manner. Matthew's correction and concern are like the relief and worry of Mary's words to her Son who had been found in the Temple, after she and St. Joseph had been searching for Him for three days: "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety" (Luke 2: 48). St. Luke then tells us in his Gospel that Jesus went with them to Nazareth "and was obedient to them" (Luke 2: 51). So, too, was Anne. Despite occasional impediments to her good intentions, she comes to realize that humble obedience to Marilla and Matthew brings far greater rewards than the thrill of her wild imaginations.

In these occasions when Anne's temper or imaginative fancies cause trouble, Matthew provides a few wise words or a gentle smile to let Anne know she *can* choose the right path. Like St. Joseph, always present although hidden, Matthew is a source of strength for Anne. They build a relationship of trust and companionship, and Anne comes to understand the quiet Matthew as well as he understands her. Indeed, in one dramatic episode during the winter, Anne's friend Diana Barry bursts into Green Gables in a panic, for Diana's little sister is sick, their parents are gone, and there is no one to go for the doctor. As Diana cries, "'Oh, Anne, I'm so scared!'" Matthew, without a word, reached out for cap and coat, slipped past Diana and away into the darkness of the yard" (141). Anne tells Diana, "He's gone to harness the sorrel mare to go to Carmody for the doctor ... I know it as well as if he'd said so. Matthew and I are such kindred spirits I can read his thoughts without words at all" (141).

Matthew, acting immediately to answer the unspoken appeal of Anne, is again like St. Joseph, who hears our every prayer, spoken or not. St. Thomas Aquinas, in fact, wrote that

“Some Saints are privileged to extend to us their patronage with particular efficacy in certain needs, but not in others; but our holy patron St. Joseph has the power to assist us in all cases, in every necessity, in every undertaking.”⁵ Matthew’s prompt action for the good of Diana’s sister resonates with St. Joseph’s prompt intercession on our behalf in all our needs.

Moreover, after Diana’s sister recovers, with Anne and the doctor’s tireless efforts, Matthew drives an exhausted Anne home, and she falls asleep on his arm. This is a brief moment in the episode, but the image of Anne sleeping on Matthew’s arm as he drives the carriage back to Green Gables is a powerful one. No matter how old we are, no matter how much strength and perseverance we display to others, we always can rest in our father’s arms.

In all these ways, then, by his gentle guidance; his prompt, humble actions; his watchfulness and care – just as he gave on that first carriage ride from the train station – Matthew reveals his steadfast and enduring love for Anne. Finally, in addition to his gift of offering Anne protection and rest, of modeling for her the joy of humble obedience in acting promptly for the sake of another, Matthew’s fatherly love also exemplifies courage and persevering endurance. This is especially revealed in his Christmas gift to Anne.

One year, two weeks before Christmas, Matthew happens upon Anne hosting a group of her classmates practicing a skit to be performed in their upcoming Christmas concert, with all the girls “laughing and chattering gaily. They did not see Matthew, who shrank bashfully back into the shadows” (195). As Matthew watches the bright animation of his Anne among her school friends, he “became conscious that there was something about her different from her mates. And what worried Matthew was that the difference impressed him as being something that should not exist. ... [After some time in deep] reflection Matthew arrived at a solution of his problem. Anne

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, <https://www.stjosephourguide.org/understanding-st-joseph/>

was not dressed like the other girls!” (195-6). They were all wearing the fashionable style of the late 1800s: dresses with extra frills, flounces, and elegantly puffed sleeves. Not so for Anne. In her first days at Green Gables, Anne had tried to convince Marilla that prettier dresses would help her behave better, since it “is ever so much easier to be good if your clothes are fashionable” (231), but Anne had long since given up such requests as practical Marilla was immune to her pleas for the beautiful, yet impractical, flounces and frills and puffed sleeves. Matthew, though, decides to give Anne a puffed-sleeve dress for Christmas, wanting to delight her beauty-loving soul. So, Matthew braves a lion’s den – in this case a shop run by a woman – to give a Christmas gift to Anne.

Although Matthew cherishes time spent with Anne, he still dreads talking to women, young or old. His courage in walking into a store to speak to a fashionably dressed and dynamic lady shopkeeper is admirable, yet Matthew cannot bring himself to form the right words. He tries, but somehow, only a haltering request for “any –well now, say, any garden rakes?” comes forth from Matthew to his regret, and to the lady clerk’s surprise at this odd man buying a garden rake in December (197). Two more humiliating and unsuccessful attempts to speak the words “I want to buy a girl’s dress with puffed sleeves” somehow came out as requests for hayseed and for twenty pounds of brown sugar. Matthew leaves the store in an embarrassment of suffering, carrying the heavy burden of a garden rake, hayseed, too much brown sugar, and failure – for he left without the Christmas dress.

Yet as St. Paul told the Romans, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us” (Romans 5:3-4). Matthew suffers, endures, and proves his true character of a father providing for his child in hopeful love. He tries again, and this time succeeds, for he

enlists the help and sewing skills of his neighbor Mrs. Rachel Lynde who assures him that Matthew's gift will be ready for Anne on Christmas. Mrs. Lynde's amusement mirrors readers' when she wonders at Matthew's desire to give Anne a beautiful dress: "To think of Matthew taking notice of it! That man is waking up after being asleep for over sixty years" (200). With his courage and perseverance, in dying to himself through loving Anne, Matthew's heart has not only become more awake, but stronger in protecting and providing for the good of his beloved child, willing her good beyond his own.

Matthew's Christmas gift to Anne reveals fatherly love in several powerful ways. First, although Matthew has offered a tender care to Anne since the first carriage ride to Green Gables, this Christmas gift is an additional, a freely given blessing for Anne, revealing his constant desire to give good and beautiful things to her. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ tells us: "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? So if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:7-11). Matthew's Christmas gift can serve as a sign of the abundance of gifts and graces that our Father in Heaven will freely give to those who ask for them.

Another element of Matthew's Christmas gift reveals the communal nature of love. Matthew's decision to enlist the help of his neighbor Mrs. Lynde in sewing Anne's Christmas dress is a powerful sign that love draws us into communion with others. St. John writes in the New Testament: "We love, because [God] first loved us. ... And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 John 4:19, 21). Matthew's love for Anne brings others into his quiet life. Mrs. Lynde was initially a nosy, outspoken neighbor,

but by the end of the story, she becomes a beloved friend of the family, revealing the truth of the communal nature of love.

Matthew's Christmas gift furthermore reveals how love transforms the one receiving that gift. Indeed, knowing that we are loved gives us a sense of assurance and purpose in all that we do. "Be not afraid" and "Fear not" says the Lord repeatedly throughout the Bible, and St. John tells us that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). An echo of this fearless love that transforms Anne occurs during her performance at the Christmas concert. After the concert, Anne tells her friend Diana:

"Oh, I was so nervous, Diana. When Mr. Allan called out my name, I really cannot tell how I ever got up on that platform. I felt as if a million eyes were looking at me and through me, and for one dreadful moment I was sure I couldn't begin at all. Then I thought of my lovely puffed sleeves and took courage. I knew that I must live up to those sleeves, Diana." (203)

Although Anne thinks of the dress, and its beautiful puffed sleeves, we know that the true source of Anne's fearless assurance is Matthew's love. At the time, she only sees the external transformation, but we readers know of the internal change: Matthew's Christmas gift is the tangible sign of his enduring love for Anne, a truth that remains securely in her heart. Thus, when Matthew is unexpectedly called to his heavenly home at the end of five brief but full years with Anne, his love remains.

By the end of the novel, Anne is sixteen, quieter and more contemplative, although still imaginative and seeking to fill her world with beauty. On the evening before Matthew died, she had gone with him to bring the cows in from the pasture. They enjoyed a leisurely walk of gentle companionship; the "woods were all gloried through with sunset and the warm splendor of it

streamed down through the hill gaps in the west. Matthew walked slowly with bent head; Anne, tall and erect, suited her springing step to his” (291). In noting his slowness, Anne mourned to him that she had not been a boy, someone more useful to lighten Matthew’s load on the farm. Yet Matthew tenderly replied: “Well now, I’d rather have you than a dozen boys, Anne ... Just mind you that—rather than a dozen boys,” calling her “my girl” and smiling his quiet, shy smile (292). Those were the last words that Matthew spoke to Anne. The next morning, after a sudden heart attack, Matthew dies.

His final words remain with Anne, giving her the reassurance of his love even in the misery of mourning him. As her friend reminds Anne: “When Matthew was here, he liked to hear you laugh and he liked to know that you found pleasure in the pleasant things around you. ... He is just away now; and he likes to know it just the same” (297). Anne finds she can still delight in the beauty of a blossoming cherry tree, and still find joy in reciting poetry; in fact, the sorrow of Matthew’s death somehow deepened Anne’s appreciation for the moments of goodness and beauty in her life – in knowing that he is still there, still delighting in those moments with her.

Indeed, Matthew’s fatherly love continues to guide Anne even after his death. For in the last pages of the novel, Anne models Matthew’s mercy and courage in rising above her own vulnerabilities to do the right thing towards another, in this case, towards her classmate, Gilbert Blythe. Similar to Mrs. Rachel Lynde, Gilbert had called Anne “Carrots!” when she was an eleven-year-old schoolgirl, and similar to her response to Mrs. Lynde, Anne lashed out in a temper, breaking her classroom slate over Gilbert’s head with a memorable “Thwack!” (111). Yet, unlike her eventual apology to Mrs. Lynde, Anne let “the iron enter her soul” (113) and refused to apologize to the schoolboy who had only wanted to get the girl with the interesting eyes to notice him. She subsequently only treated Gilbert as a scholarly rival, rejecting his

apologies and requests for forgiveness. Years went by and their rivalry grew, but upon hearing that Anne was going to commute several long miles to teach at a school that was hours away from Green Gables, Gilbert gave up his own position in a local school so that Anne could teach there instead.

When the news of Gilbert's generous and thoughtful gift reached Anne, she mused over it as she set out one evening to bring flowers to Matthew's grave. Walking back to Green Gables as the sun set over the farm, Anne catches sight of Gilbert. It seems that the memory of Matthew's humble and merciful love, of his own generous and thoughtful gifts, are part of the reason why Anne acts differently towards her classmate at this moment. Gilbert, not knowing of the change in Anne's heart, would have passed by in silence with a polite raising of his cap to acknowledge her, but Anne unexpectedly stops him, and humbly holds out her hand to him.

Deeply earnest and a bit nervous, yet full of assurance that she is doing the right thing, Anne speaks to him with sincere gratitude: "'Gilbert,' she said, with scarlet cheeks, 'I want to thank you for giving up the school for me. It was very good of you—and I want you to know that I appreciate it;'" and "Gilbert took the offered hand eagerly" with the excited question, "Are we going to be friends after this? Have you really forgiven me my old fault?" (306). Indeed, Anne had – she admitted she had forgiven him long ago, but was a "stubborn little goose" and did not want to admit it, but she has "been sorry ever since" (307). Such a confession led to Gilbert's "jubilant" determination that he and Anne will now be the best of friends, and they walk together to Green Gables in happy conversation to make up for five years of silence between them.

Entering the house, Anne wishes a loving good night to Marilla, and goes upstairs to her room with "glad content" and peace in her heart (307). She falls asleep with a quote from the poet Robert Browning on her lips: "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world" (308). God's

love, which Matthew and Marilla, Mrs. Lynde, Diana, and Gilbert gave to and received from Anne, does allow them to be all right with the world.

In conclusion, Matthew's protective, humble, and enduring love gives peace and rest to Anne, models the good of obedience for her, and encourages her to be courageous and merciful. Matthew Cuthbert, a quiet, shy farmer on Prince Edward Island, serves as a model, like St. Joseph, of the foster father who reveals the love of our Heavenly Father. In showing an abandoned orphan girl that she is treasured and wanted, in gently guiding her to a more grounded approach to her imaginative world, in modeling the courage and strength needed to apologize and to forgive, and especially in showing the willingness to suffer in order to give the perfect Christmas gift, Matthew's love transforms Anne, forever.

Matthew had said it best the evening before Anne set forth for college to gain her teacher's license. Feeling the surprise of passing time in seeing how tall and beautiful, how assured and lovely, the girl in front of them stood, Marilla had expressed her worry that Anne would be so entranced by college and city life that she would forget the humble home at Green Gables. Yet Anne fervently assured them: "It won't make a bit of difference where I go or how much I change outwardly; at heart I shall always be your little Anne, who will love you and Matthew and dear Green Gables more and better every day of her life" (276). In response to Anne's tender words and embrace, Matthew

with a suspicious moisture in his eyes, got up and went out-of-doors. Under the stars of the blue summer night, he walked agitatedly to the gate under the poplars. "Well now, I guess she ain't been much spoiled," he muttered, proudly. "I guess my putting in my oar occasional never did much harm after all. She's smart and pretty, and loving, too, which is better than all the rest. She's been a blessing to us, and there never was a luckier

mistake than what Mrs. Spencer made – if it *was* luck. I don’t believe it was any such thing. It was Providence, because the Almighty saw we needed her, I reckon.” (277)

Matthew’s words at the beginning of the story, when he told Marilla that “we might be of some good to her,” have come full circle, when he realizes, *she* was of great good to *them*. This is the gift of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s book: it reveals the reciprocal, communal, and transformative nature of love. By offering love to others, we ourselves will draw closer to God, and His love will transform us.

With God’s love in our hearts, we can face any lion as Matthew did in talking to a lady shopkeeper; we can find the courage to recite on stage as Anne did in her puffed sleeve dress; we can go out of our comfort zone as Marilla did to raise an orphan girl who floated down a river in a leaky boat one day and who broke a slate over a classmate’s head another day; and we can rise above our faults and mistakes to forgive and ask for forgiveness. All of our ordinary actions can be transformed in extraordinary ways by love, just as St. Thérèse and Mother Teresa said: “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”⁶

That great love was given to us in a stable in Bethlehem, our redemptive fruit of the tree, our bread of the everlasting covenant. Thus, the true gift of *Anne of Green Gables* is seeing how Matthew and the others’ love reveal our Heavenly Father’s love, proving St. Paul’s words true that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ...So, faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13: 7-8, 13).

Thank you!

⁶ St. Mother Teresa, <https://www.nationalshrine.org/blog/10-inspiring-quotes-from-mother-teresa/>