Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything. 

Jesuit Priest Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991)

In the romantic comedy 50 First Dates, Henry (Adam Sandler) falls in love with Lucy (Drew Barrymore). They meet in a restaurant that Lucy frequents for breakfast as part of her daily ritual. It is evident that there is great chemistry between Lucy and Henry, but the next day she doesn’t remember the encounter at all. Everyday Lucy wakes up and her mind is like a clean slate, as a result of a serious car accident that caused her to lose her short-term memory. Henry is determined to get Lucy to fall in love with him each day. Although this movie is silly at times, it teaches us about a person’s daily commitment to love another. I think it is the same with God. Scripture tells us “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him [or her]” (1 Jn. 4:16; NABRE). God has fallen in love with us and shows up everyday just to get us to fall in love with the divine. Just reflecting on our daily experiences reveals that our days are filled with gifts, miracles, and blessings from our Beloved. In our struggles and sorrows, God’s love is still there, even when we don’t feel it. I believe what makes falling in love so romantic is receiving the gift of a special person’s presence, attention, and affection. The quote attributed to Pedro Arrupe shows another important element of falling in love. It is an invitation for all people in any vocation to respond to love with love. Loving God is a daily commitment. Only when we are committed to loving God each day can our falling in love turn into staying in love. It does decide everything.

The first time I encountered Arrupe’s quote, I had just entered religious life with the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM). These captivating words were printed on the front of a greeting card from one of our sisters, welcoming me to the community. I was fascinated by the way Arrupe expressed making our relationship with God the center of our lives and the motivating force for everything we do. A major shift was already taking place in my life as I was preparing to continue formation in Illinois. This step meant leaving my beautiful Arizona desert home, my job at the bank, loving parents and grandparents, wonderful brothers, and lots of dear family and friends. But I had fallen in love with God and it did change everything. I felt called to take a leap of faith and

---

1 Christa Parra joined the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) in 2008. She has a BA in Communications with a minor in Public Relations and Spanish from Grand Canyon University. She is currently an M.Div. student. She loves spending time with family, her religious sisters, and friends. She enjoys running and dancing.  
follow the peace and joy I felt after six years of discerning religious life. I traveled nearly 2,000 miles to continue discovering how to love God as an IBVM.

Arrupe describes how falling in love affects everything a person does. My life certainly changed from working at a nine-to-five job at the bank to being a novice in canonical year. My daily schedule was no longer my own. Even though there was a certain amount of flexibility, I had fixed times for prayer, Mass, meals, formation meetings, vow workshops, and ministry. During this time of formation, I met so many incredible community members, associates of the sisters, and new friends in the intercommunity novitiate and at CTU. I learned more about the Scriptures and deepened my relationship with God especially in the person of Jesus. I studied about Venerable Mary Ward, our founder, and our Constitutions that are inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola and Ignatian spirituality. During that process, I was also learning more about who I am and how I love. Near Arrupe’s quote in my room, there is another favorite quote of mine. It says, “Only in responding to love do we become ourselves.”4 In responding to God’s love for me, I was becoming more fully myself.

I also learned that staying in love and cultivating this love affair takes time. We have this magnificent gift of energy and it matters how we use it and with whom. I am convinced that as contemplatives in action we are called to make prayer the center of our lives. We need the stillness, spiritual direction, and the annual retreat to cultivate our love affair with our Beloved. On the soundtrack of 50 First Dates, the band 311 performs a cover of a song called Love Song, originally by the Cure—“Whenever I’m alone with you, you make me feel like I am home again. Whenever I’m alone with you, you make me feel like I am whole again... However long I stay I will always love you.”5 We need the alone time with God to feel at home again, especially when we feel so far from our native land, our families, and friends. We need the alone time with God to feel whole again especially when we feel broken or in chaos. When we nurture our relationship with God, our first love, we are empowered and energized to love each person we encounter in healthy, whole, and passionate ways.

We need community, family, and friends to “stay in love” with God. Jesuit author James Martin writes, “One of the main goals of chastity is to love as many people as possible as deeply as possible.”6 We love God by loving God’s people. We in turn receive God’s love through our community members, family, friends, and those we accompany in ministry. Relationships sustain us in this journey of love. Our vows invite us to love inclusively and to honor God to whom we are committed. The beauty of Arrupe’s quote is that it shows that love is not static, but evolving as we live into our vocation. It doesn’t just happen once. We fall in love again and again and have the opportunity to recommit ourselves to staying in love again and again. It does decide everything. Just as we see various expression of love in romantic comedies and listen to them in beautiful love songs, we must remember that God shows up to fall in love with us each day as well. Arrupe invites us to show up for God, to: “Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.”