

Saint Thomas' of the Air Church  
 Quinquagesima  
 February 14, 2021  
 rmceely+

...now abideth faith, hope and charity  
 but the greatest if these is Charity

Today the Church swings shut the door on Pre-Lent and opens it wide to the Lenten Season.

In a few days people around Christendom will celebrate Shrove Tuesday with a pancake dinner or parades and parties.

Symbolically consuming the oils, fats and meat

That many will abstain from in the following 40 days.

Mardi Gras in New Orleans, French for fat Tuesday

Carnival in Rio de Janeiro

All celebrating before the discipline of Lent would forbid it.

When the party is over and the dishes and glassware are washed and put away

we look to Wednesday,

Ash Wednesday

And the moral and spiritual rigor of Lent.

And the sobering reminder as the Priest signs us with the Cross of Ashes:

Remember o man

Of dust thou art

And to dust

Thou shalt return.

And to brace us for the somber task of Lent

That scouring of our souls

And prayerful examination of our lives:

The Collect for this week

Today's Epistle and the Gospel all point us in one direction:

On this Eve of Lent:

The church points us to "Charity".

Is that the key to our Lenten Season?  
 Is Christian Love the way we will survive and prophet  
 From that upon which we are about to embark?

It is “Charity” that I want to talk about this morning.

St Paul’s Epistle is the source of this fundamental truth.

Let’s consider this morning  
 what is probably the most revered verses  
 That Paul ever wrote:

Today’s Epistle: 1 Corinthians Ctr 13.

Where Paul gives us the key to Lent

Perhaps the key to Christianity itself

And the key to Christian Life:

Charity. Or--

Christian Love.

But you see we have already fallen into a modern semantic trap

What is this ‘charity’ toward which Paul directs us?

Writing in Greek, Paul used the word agape

Which the King James translators called ‘charity’.

English is sometimes a limited language

And “agape” had no ready English equivalent.

Charity as it was used in 1611 is as close as our language  
 could come.

But the Greek term is specific

And means a specific kind of love that must understand if we  
 are to hear Paul’s voice.

To our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears ‘charity’ evokes thoughts of the Salvation  
 Army, the Goodwill or the St Vincent de Paul Society.

And we are instantly confused.

In order to try to appeal to modern language.  
 Modern day translators have substituted the word “love” for the  
 King James term; ‘charity’.

But to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears  
 Love is an emotion, especially on this Day of St Valentine  
 A noun  
 A feeling, a very nice feeling.

And therein lies the semantic trap. Does Paul mean charity or does  
 he mean love?

In Greek, Paul could be very specific  
 “Agape” did not evoke notions of the Salvation Army  
 And had nothing to do with affection,  
     the emotion shared by two people.  
 To Paul “agape”, his Greek word, was more a verb than a noun.  
 It meant what people do  
 More than what they felt emotionally.

He is not saying that we must love in the emotional sense of the  
 word.

We are not called to have affection to all mankind.  
 We do not even have to like our fellow man.

Its much more realistic and much harder than that.  
 Agape is Paul’s description of the love that God has for all His  
 creatures

That Jesus has for all of us and for mankind.  
 A love with benevolence

Esteem  
 And good will

Based upon its scriptural and historic use, Agape truly means  
 something more than simply a feeling

It means something like a conviction to action  
 A moral preference that compels action.

This agape-love is aptly defined as:  
 sacrificial action  
 only for the benefit of another  
 And without any expectation of return.

Archbishop Morse wrote:

That Charity  
 Is defined as  
 “Sacrifice  
 The abandonment of self  
 Through the complete giving of one’s self  
 In love for God  
 And others.”

He said: “Christ reveals this as the essence of God  
 In His incarnate life,  
 Jesus revealed the nature of God.

Jesus told the Apostles near the end of His ministry  
 They were to love each other as Jesus had loved them.  
 How had He loved them?  
 He gave His very life to them  
 That they might be freed from sin and have everlasting life.  
 There cannot be love without sacrifice.

In the sacrifice of the Mass  
 We offer ourselves  
 In union with the sacrifice of Christ,  
 To God  
 And to others.  
 And here in the mystery of the Mass  
 Jesus reveals in the actions of the Mass  
 The nature of God  
 Through the giving of Himself.”

The gift we receive in Holy Communion is the incarnate life of  
God in Christ

The gift is  
Our union with Him  
So that He dwells in us  
And we in Him.

That is the essence of the Charity-love that Paul shows us in  
today's Epistle.

The semantic trap thus avoided and using the word now defined;  
Charity

Let us consider anew Paul's Epistle.

Paul writes of Faith, Hope and Charity.

That they abide.

That is; they remain steadfast in us.

It will be centuries before great thinkers

Would venerate Paul's words

And recognize Faith, Hope and Charity

As the Theological Virtues.

That is,

Three gifts from God,

Inborn in us

That shape and guide our lives

To become more like Him

‘ to bring us closer to the people He created us to be  
and thus closer to Him.

The Theological Virtues

(So named because they come from God

And bring us closer to God.)

need to be practiced and exercised.

They can be lost if they are neglected.

They need maintenance

and need to be nourished from time to time.

And here is where our Lenten devotion comes into play.

The Theological Virtues work in concert in our lives.

No one of them effects us in isolation.

Without Faith, there is no Hope

Without Hope, there is no Charity

Without Charity, there is no Faith.

Our fallen world is a powerful force in our lives

And its evil influence can lead us astray

Away from that narrow pathway to God.

Sin intercedes and both obstructs us and diverts us from the life  
God has created.

So in our Lenten devotion we examine our lives

Purge the taint and tarnish of sin from our lives.

By prayer and introspection,

Confession and absolution.

Our Lenten Discipline whatever you have selected

Focuses us on sacrifice

And as we endure it we cannot help but evoke Our Lord's  
sacrifice

That we join in every Communion

But especially during the Lenten Season.

And that "Agape",

The unselfish and sacrificial love

Leads the way.

To paraphrase the Lenten Proper Preface:

Our fast, our sacrifice

Curbs our sinfulness

Raises our minds from things of Earth

Renews our strength

And rewards us with manifold blessings

And we make the annual Lenten Sacrifice  
Out of love, Charity, agape  
That is the Virtue  
The gift from God at our birth  
That drives us  
That enables us  
To make the Sacrifice.

In today's Epistle,  
in his famous poetic terms;  
Paul describes Charity  
and how it works in our lives.

Sometime today you owe it to yourself to read Chapter 13 again  
Refreshed in Paul's meaning,  
Read it anew  
And you may see something about yourself  
Your Virtue of Charity  
And how God works in your life.