

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Quinquagesima  
 March 2, 2025  
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...now abideth faith, hope and charity  
 but the greatest if these is Charity

In a few hours we hold our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Breakfast  
 Symbolically consuming the oils, fats and meat  
 That many traditionally abstained from during Lent.  
 It will be celebrated across the globe  
 As Mardi Gras and Carnival:  
 A lingering memory  
 a time when Christians boldly lived their faith  
 Without fear of criticism and recrimination.

When the party is over and the dishes and glasses are washed and  
 put away  
 we look to Wednesday; Ash Wednesday,  
 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.

To brace us for the somber task of Lent,  
 That scouring of our souls  
 And the prayerful examination of our lives,  
 The Collect for the week,  
 The Epistle and the Gospel all point us in one direction:  
 The church points us to "Charity".

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

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

Let's consider what may be the most revered verses

That Paul ever wrote:

Today's Epistle: 1 Corinthians Chapter 13.

Where Paul gives us the key to Lent

Perhaps the key to Christianity and Christian life itself:

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 selected the word "agape".

English is sometimes a limited language

And "agape" had no ready English equivalent.

"Charity" as it was used in 1611,

was as close as our language could come.

But the Greek term is specific

And means a specific kind of love

We need to understand it, if we are to hear Paul's voice.

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

And so, we are instantly confused.

In an attempt to help us of this century understand,

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

A feeling, a very nice feeling to be sure.

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

In Greek, Paul could be very specific

Agape had nothing to do with the Salvation Army  
And 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 is 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.”

You see; In His incarnate life

Jesus revealed the nature of God.

He told the Apostles near the end of His ministry

They were to love each other as Jesus had loved them.

The question for us is then, ‘How had He loved them?’

The short answer is that

He gave His very life for them

That they might be freed from sin

and have everlasting life.

And we see that 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 here, in the mystery of the Mass

Jesus reveals

The nature of God

Through the giving of Himself

in the actions of the Mass.

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";

Paul takes a deep dive into its meaning

And how it effects our Christian lives.

Let us dive into Paul's Epistle and restate it in modern terms.

Paul begins by recounting what life would be like without charity.

He says that

even if he could speak the language of all people

And could speak directly with Angels

Even if he could accurately predict  
everything that was about to happen

Even if he had  
the knowledge of the entire universe

Even if he had such faith that he could move mountains

If he did not have Charity in his heart

It would just be meaningless noise,

The tinkling of brass in the wind.

He would be nothing.

Even if he gave everything he owned to the poor

And Even if he sacrificed the last thing he had;  
 his body to be burned;  
 If he did not have Charity in his heart  
 He would never be improved by it  
 He would not see the kingdom of God

Paul then gives a poetic list of the attributes of this Charity so that we might better understand it and what he is talking about:

He says; Charity is:

Longsuffering. It patiently endures  
 Kind. Never rendering evil for evil. But benevolence.  
 Unenvying. It is happy for the blessings of others.  
 Not puffed up or vaunteth itself. It is never prideful  
 Does not behave unseemly.  
 Charity seeketh not her own. It follows the will of God  
 Charity is not easily provoked. Does not rise in anger.  
 Thinketh no evil and never rejoices in evil.  
 Charity rejoices not in iniquity but only in truth.  
 It beareth all things. Charity salves the flaws of others.  
 Believeth all things. Charity optimistically sees the best.  
 Hopeth all things. Never despairs.  
 Endureth all things. It is steadfast even in the face of  
 adversity

Paul concludes

With a promise: Charity never fails.

What we say in words will pass away  
 What we prophesy of the future will not all come to pass,  
 What we think we know will be surpassed and brought to nothing.  
 Because we are not yet complete.  
 But when we are perfected or, completed in God  
 All will be revealed

Paul says that in a way it will be like  
    When we were children  
    We held childish thoughts  
But with the passage of time  
    We entered adulthood  
    And many things became clear.

He says that for now we see as through a glass darkly  
    Our understanding is clouded  
    Like the image in a crude metallic mirror of his day  
        Dimmed by tarnish  
        Obscured by the dullness of the finish  
        And distorted by the curves and dents of the mirror  
We live in a fallen and broken world.  
And sometimes we can only see the world through a glass darkly

But Paul promises that we will see God face to face.

For now abideth Faith Hope and Charity  
    What centuries later would be known as  
    the theological virtues

But the greatest of these is Charity.

And so it has been for 2000 years.  
Has there ever been a more powerful force on the face of the earth?

Thomas Cranmer's collect of the day offers the lesson of the day:  
    All our doings without charity are worth nothing.  
    Charity is the bond of peace.  
    Without Charity, though we live,  
        We are counted as dead before God.  
We pray that God sends us His Holy Spirit  
    To pour into our hearts  
    the most excellent gift of charity.

And so we embark upon the rigors of the Lenten Season  
Strengthened with the spirit of Charity  
Of sacrifice  
Of endurance  
Of cold, hard and objective truth about ourselves.

As we encounter the boot camp of Lent,  
As we seek out and remove the tarnish of sin upon our souls  
Charity is our strength and inspiration.

We have 40 days. It all starts on Wednesday at 6, right here.