

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church

Quinquagesima

February 15, 2026

rmcneely+

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doing without charity
Are nothing worth.

Archbishop Morse who founded our order, was a learned and
imposing man of God.

One would think that if asked his favorite church season
He might tell you Christmas or Easter
Or one of the great feast days of the Church

But no.

He would tell you he loved Pre-Lent.
The time of preparation for the boot camp of Lent.

This week we bring the season of Pre-Lent to a close.
Before we leave it on Wednesday and dive into the rigors of Lent,
Let's look back a bit and look where the Church has taken us.

The Epistles have all come from Paul's letters to the Corinthians.
In which Paul pointed us to the example of
The athlete training for competition, the Olympics of his day.
Paul's own severe sufferings
He said they were the glory of God the Father in his life
And today, his exposition on Charity, Christian Love.

His message has been one of preparation, discipline and
Persistence
Of acceptance of the rigors and sacrifices of the season
And the all powerful love that drives it all.
The Church gives us the wisdom and advice of Paul
To get us to and through what we are about to do.

The Gospels have come to us from St Matthew and St Luke.
Two parables:
The laborers in the field and the sower of the seed.

And today, we conclude with Jesus telling the 12 what is coming
 Paired with the account of the blind man of Jericho
 To whom Jesus restored sight.

Gospel messages about the abundance of God's grace
 the challenges of Christian work
 And the focus on Calvary with the faith to achieve it.

The Church has prepared us well with what we need to bring
 ourselves closer to God with the Lenten sacrifice and discipline.

Today is of course, the last piece of that preparation.
 And the Collect, the Epistle and the Gospel
 Look forward to the coming of Lent
 And sets before us the ultimate ideal of Christian life
 And they all cry out with one voice:
 Christian Charity.

So, by all means, let us consider this important subject:
 Charity or Christian Love.

Our Epistles were written in Greek
 And for centuries translators have had trouble
 finding an English word
 That evokes the meaning of the Greek word
 Paul used; agape.

None of them come up with an English word that is quite right.

Perhaps the translators of the King James Bible have come closest
 With their word: Charity.

But our 21st Century ears think of charitable institutions:
 Salvation Army, United Way, St Vincent dePaul.
 However, that is far from the mark.

Other translators have come up with the word: “love”.
However that doesn’t cover it either.

We immediately,
especially in the day after St Valentine’s day
think of the romantic love shared by two people.
And that is not what agape involves.

Let me try this:

Agape is a selfless, unconditional and sacrificial love
Considered the highest form, emphasizing goodwill,
Empathy
And commitment to the well being of others
Without expecting anything in return.
It is a deliberate choice of action
Like God’s love for humanity
Or Jesus’ sacrifice.
As Paul tells us in today’s Epistle
It is characterized by patience,
kindness and perseverance.

Quite a mouthful

And we begin to sympathize with translators looking for a
single English word.

It is more an action than a thing.

It is what we do

More than what we feel.

It is the moving force that prompts all our actions.

Agape does not require a warm emotion approaching affection.
We do not need to even like the other fellow.
However, agape requires a genuine sense of wishing the other
fellow well.

Even our enemies or those that do us harm.

All these concepts are wrapped up in the notion of Agape:
Christian Love.

Paul ends this Epistle with a strong statement:
Now, there abideth faith, hope and charity,
These three
But the greatest of these is charity.

He recites what will later be known as the theological virtues:
Faith, hope and charity.
Thomas Aquinas first called them the Theological virtues
Because they are infused by God
And revealed in us by God.

Perhaps Paul viewed Charity as the greatest of the three because
Unlike, faith and hope
Which are destined to pass away,
Charity, Christian Love is eternal,
Imperishable.

The love of God will not pass away.
Not during our lifetimes and not at our death.

The Gospel for the day is probably the clearest statement
That Jesus ever made to the Apostles
About the crucifixion and resurrection.
He has told them before and they seemed nonplused
Did not comprehend what He was telling them.
These words are direct, simple and unmistakable.

It comes to us now as a reminder of the supreme example
Of Christian love
Of agape.
And as we live out our Lenten sacrifice,
Be ever mindful of what He did.

St Luke paired Jesus' clear exposition with the story of His
 Restoring the eyesight of a blind man in Jericho.
 St Mark names the man "Bartimaeus"; Bartimus in English.

It was one of those times when His disciples sought to insulate
 Him from the harangue of the mob.

But Jesus commanded that the man be brought to Him.

Jesus said:

"Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath saved thee".

Did Luke follow Jesus' clear declaration of His sacrifice
 With the story of blind Bartimus
 As another story of healing?
 Or was there more?

Is Blind Bartimus a metaphor for us who are occasionally
 spiritually blind?

We who may take lightly the agony of the Cross
 And all that Jesus endured by our sins.

Jesus said that Blind Bartimus was saved by his faith.

Notice He did not say

His sight was restored, although it was.

He said Bartimus was saved by his faith.

As we approach Lent in three days
 And as we consider the dark days of our lives
 To root out our sins
 What we have done and
 What we have failed to do
 And as we measure ourselves to the standard
 Love your neighbor as your self
 Do unto others and you would have them do unto you

As we amend our lives to be better Christians

Remember Agape

Remember the sacrifice of Christ

Remember Blind Bartimus sitting in the gate of Jericho.