

Saint Thomas' Church  
 Quinquagesima  
 March 3, 2019  
 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 hours we appropriately hold our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Celebration

Symbolically consuming the oils, fats and meat  
 That many will abstain 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 glasses are washed and put away

we look to Wednesday,  
 Ash Wednesday  
 And the moral and spiritual rigor of Lent.

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 the 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 prosper  
 From that which we are about to embark upon?  
 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' about 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 we need to understand  
 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 we are instantly confused.

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

But to our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears  
 Love is an emotion  
 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 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 or conviction

It means something like a conviction in 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 dive into Paul's Epistle.

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 say  
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 noise, 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 profit from 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:

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 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 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 through a glass darkly  
Our understanding is clouded  
Like the image in a crude metallic mirror  
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  
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?

