

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

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During this “Gesima” season we have heard of the virtues of Faith and Hope through the parables of Jesus and the Epistles of St. Paul. This Sunday we come to the virtue of Charity, or of Love, a fitting topic for St. Valentine’s Day. But the Charity, or Love, that we talk about and hear of in the Epistle and Gospel, is not the same type of love which is pedaled in the supermarkets. The Love which we hear of today is explained as an infused supernatural virtue by which a person loves God above all else for God’s own sake and loves others for God’s sake. It is perfect love, love which is not in part, is not self-seeking, self-fulfilling, or manipulative.

We see this in the Epistle and Gospel for this morning, but we also find it in the legend surrounding the life of St. Valentine. St. Valentine was a real person. He is a real saint. He was very popular in medieval times as he is the patron of courtly love. But there is more to St. Valentine than Hallmark or Walmart would lead us to believe. St. Valentine lived in Rome in the Third Century and was often in trouble with the authorities for performing Christian Weddings and for giving aid to imprisoned Christians. While on house arrest, he discussed matters of religion and faith with his judge, Asterius. During the discussion, St. Valentine pledged to prove the validity of Jesus, and the judge put him to the test. The judge had his blind daughter brought before St. Valentine, who placed his hands over her eyes restoring her sight. This so impressed the judge that he released St. Valentine and forty-four other Christians. St. Valentine was eventually imprisoned again before he was martyred by beheading, he left a note for the girl he had healed, signing it “your Valentine.” St. Valentine received the crown of martyrdom on Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> around the year 269.

Today we might think it was almost foolish for St. Valentine to promise to prove the validity of Jesus by a test. However, this is none other than an example of Charity in the life of St. Valentine, love of God for God’s own sake and the love of others for God’s sake. The saints are known for their compassion, and St. Valentine had compassion on the judge’s blind daughter. We see in this healing heroic faith and the motivation of Charity, to ask God’s healing for a blind child, that she might receive her sight, for God’s glory. In examining the legends surrounding St. Valentine, there is no mention of accolades or glory for Valentine from the judge or the Roman officials, just actions that would suit a servant and

saint of God. St. Valentine, servant of God, and saint of love, would be no saint if he did not have Charity.

St. Paul writes in this morning's Epistle, if he had all the gifts of the Holy Spirit and has not Charity, then he is useless. If he was able to understand all things, if he had faith to move mountains, but had not Charity then he is nothing. If he spends his time feeding the poor and sacrifices himself for another and has not charity then he gains nothing in the Kingdom of Heaven. We see this acted out in today's Gospel. Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, Charity in flesh and bone, prophecies to His disciples of the great lengths that the Love of God was going to go for them, to a cruel death on the cross. They understand nothing; they are not able to comprehend such love. They move on, from Jerusalem and as they go to Jericho Jesus has pity on a blind man who repeatedly calls for Him as He passes by. Those who were leading the impromptu procession had tried to silence him, they rebuked the blind man, and are the obvious example of what a lack of Charity looks like. Jesus ignores the crowd's rebukes and asks the man what He can do for him. To think that Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, would ask a blind man what he can do for him! To receive his sight, is the answer, and that is precisely what is given. Not only does Jesus heal the blind man, but He stirs up the man's charity too, so much so that he follows Jesus praising and glorifying God. This is Love of God for God's great sake, and loving others for God's glory. This is Charity.

We have heard it said that Love is blind. Yet Jesus was not blind to this poor man and through God's great love, He restored the blind man's sight. The man, in spite of his blindness had operated on pure faith, he had faith that he had been told correctly that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, and he must have already heard that Jesus could do miracles, and it was his faith that inspired him to believe that Jesus could work a miracle for him too. After healing him, Jesus tells him; *your faith has made you whole*. Faith leads to Charity, and Charity draws us closer to God.

This St. Valentine's Day, and every St. Valentine's Day, may we remember the little known story of the saint of God who through Divine Charity restored a blind girl's sight. May we remember St. Paul, who says that if he can do all things and has not charity, that he is useless. May we remember the story of those who rebuked the blind man as Jesus passed by, and yet those eyes of love turned on him and said, *thy faith hath made thee whole*. May St. Valentine's Day be for us a call to Charity, to the Love of God and Love of others for God's sake even though it may be difficult. Let us remember the rose and the thorns. And may Charity lead

us to holiness and sanctity as the servants of God. Now we are invited to receive the greatest present one could receive on St. Valentine's Day, the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Love Himself. Amen.