

Pastor's Pen: Humility and Virtue Part 5

"There are in the end three things that last: Faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love."

1 Corinthians 13:13

As we enter into Holy Week, it is necessary and appropriate to understand the last and greatest of the theological virtues: love (aka charity). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (section 1822) defines the theological virtue of charity as, "the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God." Love is that virtue by which we are completely selfless for the good of the other. Love is the commandment that Jesus gives us "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) The love of Christ pours itself completely out on the Cross.

Changing Focus

The virtue of love demands a fundamental change of focus in one's life. We live in a world where we are taught to cultivate a fundamentally immature nature by judging all reality by what it does to make me happy or content. The worth of things, people, relationships, and reality is weighed in a balance where the end goal is personal satisfaction. It leads to an idea that all things and peoples can be discarded once they cease to cause me joy. We know from experience that such a focus leads to an discontent of soul because there is no way to sate such an appetite. We know such an attitude destroys any and all relationships it touches; be it with God, spouse, family, friends, co-workers, and even society itself.

The reason for this is that we were not created to remain selfish. We are created to grow in our ability to move from a focus on oneself to a focus on others. An infant is unaware of its actions having any effect on those around them. As a child grows, we encourage them to think of others. We encourage them to love. We do this so that they may find true success and joy in life. In love, we teach them that joy comes not in selfishness but in selflessness.

The nature of God is love. He has no need to create us. He has no need to save us. He has no need to do anything for us. Yet, we believe that it is His love that brings us into existence. It is His love that holds back His fury from our rejecting Him in our selfishness. It is His love that provoked Him to send His Son into this world to be offered as a sacrifice for us, to restore balance and justice. It is eternal love that will either be enjoyed in heaven for those who choose to take on that love in their lives, or will burn like fire those who have rejected Him in their selfishness. This life is a response to God's love.

To embrace the virtue of love requires God's grace and help. To fight our selfish nature and its desire to be selfish/ to sin (called concupiscence), we are in need of God's help. When we have

failed, we need God's love through the sacrament of Reconciliation. We need the Sacrament of the Eucharist to strengthen our resolve. We need the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation to transform our souls to be open to God's love and grace and to enter into an eternal relationship with God. For those called to marriage, the sacrament of Matrimony is needed to garner the grace needed to live selflessly in a union. For those called to priesthood and diaconate, the sacrament of Holy Orders is necessary to configure our souls to Christ so that we may love as Christ loves. In each sacrament we embrace a submission of will and pledge growth in love.

Humility and Love

At the very heart of this love is a deep humility. Humility leads us to truth; truth about who we are and our need for God. Humility shines the light of truth into how we have been able to love as God would have us love and where we have failed in this call to love. Humility helps us to recognize that without God, we cannot reach the heights of selflessness called for by the virtue of love.

Humility itself is an act of love. Think about it. In 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7, St Paul talks about the qualities of love. Perhaps as a final exercise in this Lenten season, we might look at that passage and ask ourselves a fundamental question: in humility and truth, can I replace the word 'love' with my name? Let this exercise enlighten you as to where that virtue of love can be deepened in your life and in how you relate to God and others in your life

Love is patient

Love is kind

Love is not jealous

It does not put on airs, it is not snobbish

Love is never rude

It is not self-seeking

It is not prone to anger

Neither does it brood over injuries

Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices in the truth

There is no limit to love's forbearance,

To its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7