

The INTROIT (Ps. 31:1-3)

*P: Be Thou my strong Rock;*

**C: for an house of defense to save me.**

*P: Thou art my Rock and my Fortress;*

**C: therefore for Thy name's sake lead me and guide me.**

*P: In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed;*

**C: deliver me in Thy righteousness.**

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully hear our prayers and, having set us free from the bonds of sin, defend us from all evil; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 35:3-7

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.77:14-15)

*P: Thou art the God that doest wonders; Thou hast declared Thy strength among the peoples.*

**C: Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.**

The EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 13

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but

when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

The TRACT

(from Ps.100:1-4)

*P: Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness.*

**C: Enter into His gates with thanksgiving.**

*P: Know ye that the Lord, He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves;*

**C: we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Luke 18:31-43

Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.

And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?

And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

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## 1 Corinthians 13:13

νυνι<sup>G3570</sup> ADV δε<sup>G1161</sup> CONJ μενει<sup>G3306</sup> V-PAI-3S πιστις<sup>G4102</sup> N-NSF ελπις<sup>G1680</sup> N-NSF αγαπη<sup>G26</sup> N-NSF τα<sup>G3588</sup>  
T-NPN τρια<sup>G5140</sup> A-NPN ταυτα<sup>G3778</sup> D-NPN μειζων<sup>G3173</sup> A-NSF-C δε<sup>G1161</sup> CONJ τουτων<sup>G3778</sup> D-GPF η<sup>G3588</sup> T-NSF  
αγαπη<sup>G26</sup> N-NSF

But now remains faith, hope, love, the three these, greatest, however, of these, the love.

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## 1 Corinthians 13 — “But Now Remains Faith, Hope, Love, the Three These”

### INTRODUCTION

- I. IF LOVE HOWEVER I DO NOT HAVE
- II. BUT NOW REMAINS FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, THE THREE THESE
- III. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

### CONCLUSION

1 Corinthians 13 — “But Now Remains Faith, Hope, Love, the Three These”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Today is Quinquagesima, the fiftieth. We observe fifty days till Easter. Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent is this week and the appointed Epistle reading is 1 Corinthians 13.

**Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.**

**Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**

**When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

St. Paul uses very peculiar language. He speaks with words that sound very foreign to us. This is not on account of using the Greek language. It is because he speaks using the language that is not of this world. The language with which he speaks is the language of God. He speaks the language of love. This is agape. This agape is far above our thinking and our ways. It is not contrived or produced. It is that which produces and gives. It comes from above and gives life. It is the greatest of all gifts, for it is the gift of God Himself.

I. IF LOVE HOWEVER I DO NOT HAVE

**Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not**

**charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.**

If we are rightly to understand what St. Paul is teaching us, we need to go back one more verse, to the last verse of Chapter 12: **“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”** He uses two nouns together, the first of which modifies and accentuates the second. He says, **“And yet besides a hyperbole a way to you-all I show.”** A hyperbole is a “throwing beyond.” So what the apostle is showing us is something that is thrown beyond any other way that is before us. It is beyond any way that we would seek for ourselves. Moreover, it is a gift. It is not something that we seek or find or acquire or produce for ourselves. It is something from beyond us that we receive as a gift.

What is this way that is thrown far beyond us and our ways? Agape. Love. Charity.

St. Paul holds before us the things that seem impressive to us. Speaking with the tongues of men and of angels: is this not impressive to most people? When you meet someone who speaks more than one language, is this not impressive? The gift of prophecy so as to understand and know all things, and the gift of faith so as to be able to move mountains, are these not impressive? How about someone who gives millions of dollars to help poor children, is this not impressive? Have people not been wowed by Oprah and by Mother Teresa? St. Paul moves even beyond these examples and speaks of giving one’s body to be burned, either for the faith or for the sake of saving someone else. Is this not impressive? Yet the apostle says that if he does not have agape, then these are useless.

Why? Why are these impressive gifts of no profit to the one who possesses them but does not possess agape?

Consider the congregation to whom St. Paul writes this letter. He is writing to the schismatic congregation of the Corinthians. They sought with all of their strength to be people of faith and to speak in tongues and to be good people. Yet they became more and more divided. They disintegrated to such a degree that they even imagined that they could eat the Lord’s Supper without rightly discerning the body of the Lord. For all of the impressive things that they displayed, St. Paul said that their suppers, their fellowship dinners and love feasts, were not the Lord’s Supper.

What was the problem? The problem was that they were focusing upon themselves and their own works and accomplishments. They were trying to be like God and to act with great godliness and love. They were trying to produce for themselves what only God can provide. Their efforts were selfish, that is, from themselves, rather than flowing from the love that is from above, the love that is of God.

Is this not the same problem that Christians suffer today? Is this not the reason that the churches leave people hungry and searching for more? Is not the emphasis on witnessing and growing the church and keeping the church alive and other such motivations? These are not the way of love. This is not the way of true charity.

**Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in**

**iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**

What does it matter if a congregation is growing mightily, if those who attend are not united in the love of God that is poured out in Baptism and the Holy Supper? What does it matter if money is collected for missions, if the Gospel that is preached is not the Gospel of Christ crucified? What does it matter if great sums of money are collected so that many hungry people are fed and sick people are given medical treatment, if these poor souls are only fed and treated in their bodies, but are not given the bread of heaven?

But even if all these things are done rightly, and even if others do benefit, what good does it do me if I do not have agape myself? Is my love perfect? Does my love have the power to preserve me or anyone else everlastingly? Do any of my efforts have this power? Do yours?

## II. BUT NOW REMAINS FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, THE THREE THESE

**When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.**

What are the childish things of which the apostle speaks? All of the things that he mentioned above are the childish or infantile things. Those who imagine that speaking in tongues is impressive, these are infantile in their thinking. The very existence of the many tongues is on account of sin, not of faith. The LORD caused confusion of the languages because men sought to be powerful through their own efforts. They imagined that they could reach God by what they would do for themselves. So the LORD confused their languages, making them unable to understand one another so that they dispersed and stopped their faithless planning. Yet how many so-called faithful Christians emphasize speaking in tongues, especially unintelligible tongues, as signs of being specially blessed by God? How many imagine themselves to be advanced in the faith because of their tithes and other offerings and other charitable giving? How infantile! How childish! How arrogantly faithless!

If you pass by an object made of stainless steel or of shiny brass, you can see yourself in the reflection. But the image that you see is distorted. Moreover, it is exactly backwards. It is not a true image. It is blurry and distorted and backwards.

This is what we see of ourselves when we look to see ourselves as children of God in any of the things that we do. Even our best efforts are still corrupted and twisted by sin. When we look to our own prayers, we find selfishness. When we look to our worship, we find idolatrous wandering of our hearts and minds to many things. When we look even to our own faith, we find weakness and doubting, which is blasphemy and idolatry. In none of these things will we ever see ourselves as God's perfect, holy, beloved children of true faith and hope and love.

Out of all of the gifts, St. Paul tells us that three remain, faith, hope, love. He says this in a very peculiar way. He says, **“But now remains faith, hope, love, the three these.”** *Ta tria*

*tauta*: the three these, the Trinity. Faith, hope, love, the three in one. These three are inseparable. None of the other gifts have any meaning without these three. From these three all of the other gifts flow to the Church. Not everyone possesses the other gifts individually. All of the other gifts are given to individuals for the sake of the body. But these three, faith, hope, love, these three are the possession of all who are baptized into Christ. These three are the restoration into the Holy Communion of God.

### III. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

St. Paul says: **“But now remains faith, hope, love, the three these, greatest, however, of these, the love.”**

All of the other gifts St. Paul says are temporary and will fade or pass away. But these three abide or remain forever. These three will never end. St. Paul calls this “The Three These.” There are clearly three, but they are one. The three are together eternal, yet not three eternal, but one eternal.

To the Galatians St. Paul wrote:

**But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:22-27)**

This faith is Jesus, the Christ. He is the eternal faith through which Adam and Eve received the hope of salvation and everlasting life. Noah and Abraham and all of the saints walked according to this promised Savior, the faith that was theirs and abided in them and yet was still to come.

Because of the Word that the LORD had spoken, this faith abided in them and kept them abiding in the hope of God’s promises and salvation. This hope was theirs because of the working of the Holy Spirit, who abided with them through the continual preaching of the Word of the Faith, that is Jesus.

Yet both the Faith and the Hope are sent and given from God who is Love. God is always the Father, through whom all things have their being. God is Love and love is of God. Thus love is the greatest, for the Faith and the Hope are sent and proceed from the Love. Yet The Three These, the three are one and work all good things for us.

Thus we hear in John 3:

Jesus answered, **Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.** Nicodemus answered

and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you *of* heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.  
(John 3:5-16)

This is why the apostle says that apart from agape, nothing else has any value. For God is agape and because of His love we have faith and hope as He works forgiveness and everlasting life on our behalf.

## CONCLUSION

Today's Epistle reading has been appointed to accompany the Gospel reading where Luke records for us the account of Jesus restoring sight to the blind man as Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. Jesus was on His way to accomplish what Love sent Him to do for us. He was journeying in the way of agape. He was journeying in the way of the cross. We are like this blind man and all who were with Jesus on that day. Luke tells us:

**Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.**

Today is Quinquagesima, the fiftieth. Wednesday begins the season of Lent, the season of special preparation for going with Jesus to the cross of our salvation and then to the resurrection unto everlasting life. This is what has been promised from the very beginning. This is the way of love. We go this way on every Lord's Day. We hear the calling of the Holy Spirit to come together into the name of Jesus to be blessed again with the gifts of Faith, Hope, Love, The Three These. God is with us and is giving Himself to us for our salvation and restoration into His Holy Communion. In a few moments He shall give Himself to us in the body and blood of our Lord Jesus. Is there anything greater in this world? Is there anything in which we should share together with greater zeal? What can we seek for ourselves that surpasses this? In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.