

Quinquagesima 2026

Sermon-Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

1 Cor. 13.1-13 St. Luke 18.31-43



Faith, hope and charity are the greatest gifts of the Holy Spirit... powerful words from our friend Saint Paul. Charity is superior to faith and hope because it never dies. Faith and hope carry us through this life. They will not be needed when, as Paul says, we see God “face to face”. Charity carries us through this life, and into life everlasting.

The word *charity* is derived from the Latin *caritas*. The equivalent Greek word is *agape*. Both words denote the highest form of selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love, representing God's love for humanity. *Agape* focuses on divine, unconditional love, while *caritas* is often used to describe that love in action—charity, compassion, and caring for others, especially the vulnerable and disenfranchised members of society.

This morning's Epistle is Paul's famous sermon on Christian Love. It is one of the most quoted, and least understood of his letters, especially when it comes to the true meaning of Christian Love. People often attach a sentimental or emotional meaning to the words love and charity. We think of charity only as giving clothes, food, or money to people who are less fortunate than we are. Christian love isn't about what we think or feel...it's about acting on our desire to reach out to others.

Christian Love is selfless and unconditional. Christian Love never asks the question “What am I going to get out of this action”? When we do what's best for others, the doing is the reward. It's the reward because we know in our hearts we are doing what Jesus told us to do: Love others just as much as he loves us. Anything less than showing unconditional love toward others, Paul tells us, is like making a lot of senseless noise that does us no good.

Christian love means we have to be patient and kind, not be jealous about the gifts others have...use the gifts God has given us correctly. We should not hold grudges. We should never be happy when bad

things happen to others. We should never give up and should let faith, hope and love go to work within us every day of our lives.

It is unlikely any of us here today will ever have to face death because of our belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and our commitment to do what is right for others even when we are criticized for actions. Paul and the other early-day Christians knew they risked imprisonment and death because they were spreading the Gospel message of unconditional love. They were doing what Jesus told them to do: they showed their love for others just as much as he showed his love for them.

Jesus always did what was best for others. He did not ask to be congratulated or praised for what he did to heal people of their physical and spiritual blindness, He knew it was the reason he came to us, to make life better for us. In the Gospel he heals a blind man. People in those days thought a person who was blind or had some other illness had committed a horrible sin and were being punished by God. He would have been shunned by society and reduced to begging for help. Jesus showed God doesn't like to see people suffer. The blind man asked Jesus to give him his sight, and he did just that.

This coming Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent. We will journey through Lent with our eyes, minds, and hearts focused on the cross and the unconditional sacrificial love Jesus showed in shedding his blood...and it was for us. We will spend time doing some honest soul-searching...and make love more than a word we hear in church. Make our love outward reaching.

Where do we need to make some improvements in your spiritual life? Have we said something bad about someone? Have we been mean to someone? Have we been jealous? Have we been dishonest? Do we hold grudges? Have we refused to try and fix a broken relationship? Christian Love does mean saying we are sorry! We need to follow Paul's instructions and turn away from those behaviors that separate us from God's love and others. We need to look at the Cross and let Jesus heal us like he did the blind man? If we do that, we will begin to see ourselves as God sees us, and not in a fuzzy and distorted way. We will show we are Christians by our selfless and unconditional love!

Let's pay attention to the Collect and ask God to send into our hearts his most excellent gift of love...today...tomorrow...and always.

