Quinqua(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**: a

Lent begins next Wednesday with Ash Wednesday. Today is *Quinquagesima* or the 50th day before Easter. Of the “*gesima*” Sundays, of which next Sunday, *Quadragesima*, is the last, this Sunday is the closest to its Latin meaning since Easter will be 49 days from now.

Now Lent is often seen as a dreary season on the calendar through which Christians plod as on a forced march, or D-day, or taking medicine without the spoonful of sugar. Many hope they can, as with New Year's Resolutions, somehow actually survive till the end.

I will have more to say about this next week, but, I will add for now that there is a reason that Christians traditionally have been urged to give up something that they like, such as chocolate, smoking, drinking, or in more recent years television, soda or computer games**/**social media. The purpose of such *abstinence* is that the absence of something we regularly have will prod us into self-reflection, which of course opens a door to the Holy Spirit to help transform us into a holier person.

*“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished there.”* [Lk. 18:1]

Our Epistle is St. Paul's so called “hymn of love”. Many consider it the most beautiful passage in the New Testament. While I would put Christ's high priestly prayer for his disciples in the Gospel of John, which one reads at EP on Maundy Thursday, slightly above today's Epistle in that department, Paul's hymn of love is certainly the most *poetic* passage in the NT I believe.

He starts by making the simple point that anything gift which we might value is worthless if charity is not behind it. We may have the impressive ability to preach or interpret “tongues” or **speak** many foreign languages. We may have the gift of great intelligence, reasoning, and education. We may have great confidence in our abilities. We may give lots of money to charity. We may aspire to be martyred for Christ. All of these seemingly incredible wonderful gifts are just empty if we are not charitable towards others. St. Paul calls it the greatest of all virtues

Today we begin to focus on Jesus display of **all** the virtues through his Passion: not just faith, hope, and charity, but the **cardinal** ones also of**:** prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. (Cardinal comes from the Latin adjective "*cardinalis*" meaning: hinge-like and since doors turn on hinges a cardinal virtue means "something on which development turns".) Though Jesus' disciples would not understand his display of the seven virtues, initially--indeed they tried to talk him out of it--they would come to understand his perfect display of all seven with time, after his Resurrection from death.

So Jesus was heading to Jerusalem for the last time. We know from the Gospels that he had been there several times already, and as a good Jew maybe every year. But this would be the last time, and he knew what awaited him there, this time. (He would not be **wowing** the elders.) He also knew that he could “get out of it”, that he did not HAVE to die. He could go back to Nazareth, build furniture, and just live “the peaceful life” that we all crave.

If nothing else, and of course for us Christians there is very much “else”, but, if nothing else, this makes Jesus the most heroic and gallant person in human history. The cardinal virtue of "fortitude", which is similar in meaning, was sought even by the Stoics.

Yet, my dictionary contrasts **gallant** to other terms conveying bravery , courage, or resoluteness as also carrying an inner nobleness which makes one intentionally willing to sacrifice one's own life to save others. Jesus chose to do something knowing with 100% certainty that it not only would absolutely produce great pain for him, but also absolutely cause his death.

When we speak of someone doing something courageous the element of time to decide can play a factor as to just how brave one has been. A mother who runs into the burning house to save her child is being very brave on the spur of the moment.

Yet, perhaps even braver is the young person who decides to become a firefighter and learn how to do for a living what is contrary to human nature: running INTO a burning house. Equally brave, I believe we all would agree, are the young people who join the military in the time of war knowing that they *probably* will end up in harm's way. And I believe being a police officer has for quite a long while also been a job which requires a strong inner courage.

All of these three jobs involve a conscious decision to embark upon an activity or path of life which **may** lead to a lot of pain and **might** possibly even death down the road. It is a decision that is made harder knowing that one could just as easily become a plumber, go to law school or become a teacher.

Yet, even in the decision to become a firefighter, soldier, or policeman, none of these is made knowing with absolute certainty that one **is** going to die in the line of duty. One can join the army during wartime and end up like Radar O' Reilly or working in the mess tent or the motor pool.

Perhaps the most heroic people we do hear of are those who end up winning Medals of Honor. They are awarded to those in the military who distinguish themselves through "conspicuous gallantry at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty." Usually it, for obvious reasons, ends up being give to the soldier's spouse or parents. (One may have fallen upon a grenade to save one's comrades on patrol.) Yet, even there, the gallant course of action taken was something which flowed from inside *at the spur of the moment*, just as the mother who knows instinctively that she MUST run into the burning house for her child.

Jesus' decision was different from all of these situations. Again, he could have just gone back to Nazareth and become a carpenter again or maybe a rabbi. Instead, he took a course of action to save the lives of others (ours) even though he had lots of time to ponder that he would suffer greatly AND ultimately also **would** die. He was able to embrace this heroic course of action because he could see beyond the pain to the greater glory of the Resurrection... and New Life.

In this regard, I find that the closest corollary to what we have in Jesus' announcement in our Gospel today may well be seen in...any young woman who, upon learning that she is pregnant, decides to **keep** the child. While in modern America death during childbirth is fairly rare, the young mother still knows that at the end of nine months will come a time of great pain, likely the worst of her life, with the possibility that the child might be stillborn or abnormal. Yet, she is able to endure the idea of her upcoming “travail” by seeing past the pain to the greater joy of the... new life to be born.

We today are on the cusp of a period of a trial, possibly hardship, with the season of Lent. Let us walk through our time of trials helped by looking past the relatively short and limited amount of discomfort focused upon a far greater joy: "nearer my God to thee". Let us not progress through Lent as though slogging ashore on Normandy Beach. Rather, let us walk this Lent with the most heroic and most virtuous person who ever lived. Let us walk focused, as he **himself** did, upon the joy and glory of the Easter morn to come. Amen. +