Quinqua(2024)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**:.

 Today is *Quinquagesima* or the 50th day before Easter. Of the four ancient “*gesima”* Sundays, which most of Western Christianity retired 40 plus years ago, the others being *Septuagesima*, *Sexagesima* and *Quadragesima,* next Sunday, today is the one closest to its actual Latin meaning, since Easter will be **49** days from today.

Again, the purpose of *gesimatide* has been to serve as a "warmer-upper" to Lent which in itself serves as a warm-up for the greatest season of the Church, Eastertide.

 Lent, which begins this Ash Wednesday, is often seen as a dreary season on the calendar through which Christians plod as on a forced march or taking medicine, hoping they can, as with New Year's Resolutions, somehow actually survive till the end. Traditionally Christians 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, or social media.

 The purpose of such *abstinence,* as you may have heard before, 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 begin to transform us. Yet for some a better approach to that same end would be to DO something spiritually each day that we have not been doing.

 It may be that we really have wanted to have a better prayer life, but just never have gotten around to actually doing it. It may be that we want to learn more about the Bible, about our faith, but just never seem to find the time. Needless to say the devil loves to continually throw road blocks in front of any and all such activities. And it is…the tax season.

 Thus, rather than have excellent goals go unfulfilled and get topped with not only suffering but also a heaping of GUILT, it may be better to resolve finally to make some time daily simply to say MP or EP or... read into the *Bible*, and keep eating your cookies. But just in case one tries something hard, like **giving up coffee,** and starts failing, it is okay to admit one’s imperfection and try again, and not just give up entirely.

My hope and prayer for each of you during this Lent is that when Easter morning comes you will feel as though the Lord walked with you on a wonderful journey, ala "the Way of St. James" in Spain, and not like you've been stuck in Gaza for forty days and nights.

*" we see through a glass, darkly; but... now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* ***+***

 Corinth was known for its mirrors. The mirrors we know using glass are a much later development from about the 13th Century. A mirror in St. Paul's time was a piece of very highly polished metal. As such it could not show a true image as we see in our mirrors. About the only time one could get a really true image was by looking into a pool of **clear**, still water.

 Man has never seen things clearly. Paul writes elsewhere that the Temple in Jerusalem itself was just an **image** or reflection of what existed in heaven.

 If man saw things clearly he would know that he should love God for all that He has done for him and continues to do. He would not want to displease Him but to **please** Him. And, because he would realize that God created the earth and all that is in it including our fellow brothers and sisters, man would want to try to be kind and loving to everyone whom his loving Father also made.

 Such love is called *agape* in Greekor in Latin *caritas*. We call it "charity". When directed towards another human it is altruistic and seeks "the best" for the other person. Its opposite would not only be hate, but also indifference, ala the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

 This passage today has been nicknamed the "*Song of Love*". Through its very poetic form and cadence, it lists 15 characteristics of charity. Some characteristics are given as positives, "love suffereth long and is kind". Other times the characteristic is given negatively, "charity envieth not....doth not behave itself unseemly". He ends simply by calling charity the greatest of the theological virtues, even ahead of faith and hope.

 Faith without kindness towards others can lead to terrible outcomes. King Phillip the Second of Spain was a very devote Catholic, but, he thought the absolutely correct thing to do was begin the Spanish Inquisition which, as we know, was not kind at all to its many, many victims.

 With of charity in one’s heart hope **also** is strengthened. While other teachers may have given up on a student as hopeless or a "dunce", to use an old term, a kind teacher sees hope for the child and may well get him to succeed despite his shortcomings.

 There is also a permanence to love. Love is actually a great argument for the existence of eternity. When we love another we enter into an existence which transcends time. We say: "I will love you always". The OT book the *Song of Solomon* puts it beautifully: "many waters can not quench love, neither can floods drown it".

 When **we** speak of charity we typically mean an organization of people doing educational, spiritual, or humanitarian work, such as the University of Nebraska, the Red Cross, or well, *St. John the Bap*tist.

Yet Paul points out, in a passage that would shock many today, that simply giving away a lot of money to good causes is meaningless. Without love for one’s fellow man behind it, the action is empty. You might get a nice tax deduction, get invited to functions, and civic councils. But, as Jesus says in the Gospels, "they HAVE their reward". Without concern for your fellow man in the eyes of the Lord it is as if**:** you did not give anything away.

 The town next to my hometown west of Chicago was very wealthy and noted as the home of many famous Italian gangsters. Not surprisingly **it** had almost no crime. It also had simply gorgeous churches, mostly Catholic. More than once my grandmother drove me past one of these magnificent edifices. A couple of times I commented on seeing something new being added, such as a new stain glass window or transept. She would comment, "I guess someone must have killed somebody".

When I would inquire about what she meant my gran would remind me that, my late grandfather had been a judge in Chicago (and a Republican at that), and had related that gangsters became really generous after "rubbing out" someone. Their motivation though was completely self centered. They believed that by giving a new beautiful window for the Monsignor that when they showed finally up at the pearly gates... they wouldn't be the worst person to arrive that day. No doubt these bad guys never had had to study today's Epistle in Catechism class.

 Needless to say, our Lord was very charitable towards the blind man, called Bartimaeus in Mark's account. Even though Jesus was in the midst of a crowd and was being interrupted, most rabbis then taught as they walked, Jesus stopped to help.

 Since charity is the greatest virtue, as we approach Lent we might, indeed should, inquire, "how can I grow in this way?" Well our collect is a great prayer: "Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues...."

 If we were to amend it just by adding the very beginning of last week's collect for *Sexagesima*, we would in effect be praying our Epistle. Yes, that might be the perfect prayer to keep near us during Lent**:**

 "O Lord, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do, and hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake". Amen. +