

QUINQUAGESIMA 2019
SERMON-SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
1 COR. 13.1-13 ST. LUKE 18.31-43



Faith...Hope...Love...more than words...they are actions which define the Christian Life. They are the greatest of God's gifts...which we strive to maintain and increase as we move toward the Season of Lent.

We say we are people of Faith because we believe what the Scriptures teach us about Jesus is true. For our Faith to be genuine it must be acted upon.

We say we are people of Hope who look forward to experience what we have not yet seen...eternal life in heaven with Jesus. For our Hope to be genuine it must be acted upon.

We say we are people who love. Paul tells us love is the greatest of the three gifts of God's Holy Spirit. For our Love to be genuine it must be acted upon...and it must be sincere and unconditional.

Let's return for a moment to last week's discussion about "those Corinthians" and the letter Saint Clement of Rome wrote to them. Clement understood Paul's harsh tough-love approach was motivated by love...authentic, heart-felt, visceral love.

Listen to what Clement wrote to the Church in Corinth...

... "Let the one truly possessed by the love of Christ keep his commandments. Who can express the binding power of divine love? Who can find words for the splendor of its beauty? Beyond all description are the heights to which it lifts us. Love unites us to God; "it cancels innumerable sins," has no limits to its endurance, bears everything patiently. Love is neither servile nor arrogant. It does not provoke schisms or form cliques, but always acts in harmony with others. By it all God's chosen ones have been sanctified; without it, it is impossible to please him."...

The operative word here is LOVE...the same kind of love Jesus has for us...unconditional, authentic heart-felt, visceral. Without the kind of love Clement and Paul are talking about...not an intellectual love but a vibrant love reaching out to the whole world...the love that does what is right and good for others...it is simply not possible to please God. Christian love means taking action!

We often read Paul's letter about Faith, Hope and Love at the beginning of the Nuptial Mass. The Exhortation read at the beginning of Holy Matrimony in the *Book of Common Prayer* reminds us the joining together of the Man and Woman points to the mystical union between Christ and his Church. Husband and wife are supposed to love each other and want what is best for each other...just as Jesus loves us and wants what is best for us. We should always act for the good of others.

Jesus always did what was best for others. In the Gospel he is on his way to Jerusalem to fulfill his mission when he encounters a man who lost his sight. He cries out to Jesus to heal him. The crowd tries to shut the man up...he just cries out louder..."Help me, Jesus, David's Son." And Jesus restores his sight.

Saint Mark gives the blind man a name...Bartimaeus...literally Son of Honor. His physical blindness didn't keep him from "seeing" who Jesus really is...God's Son...who could make him whole again. Bartimaeus shows the kind of faith Jesus wants us to show...faith that produces results.

We're about to start our Lenten Journey to Good Friday and the Cross. We will spend time in prayer and fasting. The spiritual exercises and disciplines we gladly take on should bring us closer to the ideals of Christian life. We will ask God to increase unconditional, authentic, heart-felt, visceral love in our lives...and that this love will motivate and sustain us in everything we think and speak and in every action we take.

We can start by practicing the kind of love Paul reminds is not jealous or conceited or proud...the kind of love that is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable...the kind of love that is truthful...the kind of love that doesn't hold grudges...the kind of unconditional love Jesus teaches...the kind of love that never gives up.

And we should take a look at ourselves in the mirror...we get a fuzzy image of ourselves...Lent is about getting a better, clearer image of ourselves and making changes so we can walk as we should.

Faith...Hope...Love...more than words...they are actions which should define who we are. Now is the time to take action!

