

Quinquagesima Sunday 11 February 2018

“And if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing.” I Cor. 13: 3

In this last Sunday before the holy season of Lent, the Church gives us scriptural readings that are most appropriate for this penitential season. In the Epistle (I Cor. 13:1-13), St. Paul tells us of the importance of charity in the spiritual life: ***“And if I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing.” I Cor. 13:3*** Without charity, we are nothing, even if we could perform miracles, prophesy, and have faith to move mountains. In the Gospel (Lk. 18:31-43), Jesus, who is charity itself (cf. I Jn. 4:16) cures the blind man who, according to Pope St. Gregory the Great, represents the human race: ***“The man born blind of whom the Gospel tells is surely the human race. Ever since man has been turned out of Paradise in the person of our first father, he has not known the light of heaven, and therefore has suffered through being plunged into the darkness of condemnation.”*** Jesus speaks to the Apostles about His impending passion and death on the cross to prepare them for the ultimate proof of His love for the human race. This is why He is bound for Jerusalem: ***“Behold, we are going to Jerusalem, and all things that have been written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished...and after they have scourged him, they will put him to death; and on the third day he will rise again.”*** Lk. 18:33 With charity and the cross, we see the two great teachings of the spiritual life, not only for Lent but also for the whole of the liturgical year. Sadly, many are blind to the importance of charity and the cross. This is why the miracle Jesus works on the blind man (whose name is Bartimeus in St. Mark’s Gospel) is most significant; he is blind but so also are the Apostles who do not understand that Jesus must suffer to enter into His glory. The blind man has faith in Jesus and is cured. The Apostles will only see the truth of the cross after the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The people of Corinth are also “blind” and this is why St. Paul has to tell them how important charity is in comparison to the charismatic gifts of tongues, prophesy, knowledge and even faith. If we are going to enter into the truth of charity and the cross, we too need a miracle of grace that only Jesus can give. Charity and the

cross go together and cannot be separated; without charity, the cross is purposeless and the cross without charity ***“profits nothing.”*** I Cor. 13:3

Without Charity, the Cross is nothing

Dom Prosper Gueranger in his classic work, *The Liturgical Year Vol. 4* comments on today’s epistle: ***“How appropriate for this Sunday is the magnificent eulogy of charity, here given by our apostle! This virtue, which comprises the love both of God and of our neighbour, is the light of our souls. Without charity we are in darkness, and all our works are profitless. The very power of working miracles cannot give hope of salvation, unless he who does them has charity. Unless we are in charity, the most heroic acts of other virtues are but one snare more for our souls. Let us beseech our Lord to give us this light. But let us not forget that, however richly He may bless us with it here below, the fullness of its brightness is reserved for when we are in heaven; and that the sunniest day we can have in this world, is but darkness when compared with the splendour of our eternal charity. Faith will then give place, for we shall be face to face with all truth; hope will have no object, for we shall possess all good; charity alone will continue, and, for this reason, is greater than faith and hope, which must needs accompany her in this present life. This being the glorious destiny reserved for man when redeemed and enlightened by Jesus, is it to be wondered at that we should leave all things, in order to follow such a Master? What should surprise us, and what proves how degraded is our nature by sin is to see Christians, who have been baptized in this faith and this hope, and have received the first-fruits of this love, indulging, during these days, in every sort of worldliness, which is only the more dangerous because it is fashionable. ...If there be charity within our souls, it will make us feel these offences that are committed against our God, and inspire us to pray to Him to have mercy on these poor blind sinners, for they are our brethren.”*** Gueranger, p. 188-9

Blindness of the Body and the Soul

Today’s Gospel sets before us additional examples of two types of blindness: the most apparent is that of the blind man at Jericho; the second blindness is that of the Apostles who cannot understand what Jesus is saying about His coming

passion and death. In the passage for today's gospel in St. Matthew (and also in St. Mark), the mother of two of the Apostles, James and John, wants her sons to **"sit one at thy right hand and one at thy left hand, in thy kingdom."** Mt. 20:21. Ironically, this is right after Jesus spoke of His coming passion. The blind man is cured, but the Apostles will not be cured of their blind ambition until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when they will realize that Jesus had to suffer death and rise again in order to redeem mankind. The Apostles were blinded by their hopes that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom in which they would be leaders of the people. The blind man recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."** Lk. 18:38. Even when he is told to be quiet, he cried out all the louder, **"Son of David, have mercy on me."** Lk. 18:39 Jesus recognizes His faith and asks him what he wishes. The blind man said, **"Lord, that I may see."** And Jesus said, to him, **"Receive thy sight, thy faith has saved thee."** Lk. 18: 41-42.

"Lord, that I may see." Lk. 18:41

The lesson for today's gospel is that we all need to cry out with the blind man, **"Lord, that I may see."** Lk. 18:41. He was physically blind, but he could see spiritually that Jesus could cure him. The Corinthians in today's Epistle are blinded by their charismatic gifts and fail to see the need to practice charity. The Apostles are blinded by ambition and fail to see the need of the cross. Only with charity, does the suffering of the cross take on its fullest meaning: **"...and if I give my body to be burned, yet do not have charity, it profits me nothing."** I Cor. 13:3. St. Augustine remarked: **"It is not the martyrdom that makes the martyr, but the motive for it. A fanatic can give his life for a cause which is not right or just."** (*The Preacher's Encyclopaedia*, p. 686)

What is Charity?

St. Paul reminds the Corinthians that charity is the most important virtue for the Christian. It is better than all the charismatic gifts: **"And I point out to you a yet more excellent way, If I should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I have become a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And If I know prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith to remove mountains, yet do not have charity, I am**

nothing..." I Cor. 13:1-2. Charity encompasses all the virtues: **"Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy, is not pretentious, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, is not self-seeking, is not provoked; thinks no evil, does not rejoice over wickedness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."** I Cor. 13:4-7 There is nothing greater in this world than charity, and there is no explanation of charity better nor more lyrical than St. Paul's: **"Charity is patient, is kind; charity does not envy ..."**

Ash Wednesday, 14 February 2018

"Remember, man, that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return." (cf. Gen. 3:19)

Let us make this Lent a season of penance and prayer for our world. Our Lady said at Fatima that **"whole nations could be annihilated."** This is certainly possible in these times when nation threatens nation. Let us meditate on these words from II Chronicles 7:14: **"...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn away from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."** II Chronicles 7:14