

Quinquagesima (2025)

If you love him, why not serve Him?

So goes the words of an old Negro spiritual.

A good thought indeed. Talk is cheap. Love for God if it is genuine involves sacrifice and doing.

The same is true with love for neighbor.

The love of which Paul speaks in his ode to love in 1 Corinthians 13 . . . involves getting our hands dirty . . . doing things we may well find uncomfortable . . . loving the tiresome . . . being patient and kind.

With that said, the lyrics of this song can be turned around. It is equally valid to say: *If you serve him, why not love him?*

This is the thought which lies behind the phrase in today's collect: **“All our doings without charity [love] are nothing worth.”**

It is possible to serve God – at least in an outward and perfunctory way – without loving Him.

The people who do this may teach Sunday School, serve on church boards and committees, volunteer for this or that activity, give money to good causes, give up something for Lent. But they do these things out of grim duty.

Perhaps because that is what is expected of good Christians or because other people are doing them or for outward show.

But there is a better way. I am sure you have heard the story of the older boy who was seen carrying a crippled child on his shoulders. Someone remarked, “That’s quite a heavy burden you are carrying.”

The boy responded. “He ain’t heavy; he’s my brother.”

So, it is with service for God. When love is added to the equation, weights are lifted, duties become joys. “If you serve Him, why not love Him?”

A good thought indeed as we prepare to begin Lent this coming Wednesday.

In this season, such practices as prayer, abstinence and almsgiving are encouraged.

In pre-Reformation times, these disciplines were stricter and more carefully observed than they are today in Western society.

The reason for pancakes on Shrove Tuesday was to use up ingredients not permitted in Lent . . . such things as animal fats, milk and eggs.

As a remnant of these stricter practices, many church people today give up some small thing in which they find pleasure

For example, I have one friend who gives up rutabagas (I am more than a little suspicious of how many rutabagas he eats when it is not Lent!)

I have another friend who gives up olives. Another who gives up beer. I'm not sure if it is Jax or Falstaff!

Still others, perhaps in addition to giving up something, *take on* some positive activity. For example, instead of watching television, they read.

No doubt such observations can be helpful. Our appetites often get out of control. Instead of eating to live, we live to eat. The body needs to be brought into subjection to the spirit.

But, if these things are to be of any lasting benefit, they must be done out of love and not out of grim duty.

Love is showcased in today's Epistle, beginning as it does with the words: "Charity (or love) suffereth long and is kind . . ."

We are all familiar with this passage, as it is often read out at weddings. But, what about today's Gospel? Does it have anything to say about love?

It does indeed. Here we find Jesus practicing the same love Paul enjoins on Christians in 1 Corinthians 13.

This passage falls into two distinct parts. In the first, we find Jesus exhibiting the love that is "slow to lose patience."

With whom? /// Well, with none other than with the disciples. At times, they could be dense headed. This was one of those occasions.

They were on the last leg of their journey to Jerusalem for what would be their last Passover.

On several occasions Jesus had warned them of what awaited Him in Jerusalem. He would be rejected by His own nation and put to death by the pagans – the Romans.

In today's passage, he tells them again:
“Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished . . .”

Did they take in His words? /// No.

They were bound and determined that He was going to fulfill the expectation common to the Jews of that day . . . that He would be a

successful, triumphant messiah, restoring the earthly fortunes of Israel and becoming an earthly king.

How did Jesus deal with their spiritual blindness? /// With loving patience.

What about you and me? Are we ever slow to hear and do God's word?

I dare say we are. Hence, the way Jesus dealt with the disciples should be a source of great encouragement.

God does not cast us away at such times. He bears with our weaknesses.

In the words of Psalm 103:14: **“For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”**

Aren't you glad He does?

What should follow from this knowledge is a willingness to show like loving patience with our fellow human beings.

“Charity suffereth long and is kind,”
again to quote Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.

That was Jesus’ way, and it should be our way.

Look for opportunities this coming week for showing loving patience . . . perhaps with a family member or fellow church member.

So, as today’s Gospel opens, we find Jesus demonstrating love. But what about in the second section, the section in which Jesus heals a blind beggar?

Love is at the forefront here as well.

A lesser man might have ignored the cries of this noisome beggar . . . viewed him as a nuisance and pest and passed on by.

But not Jesus. Love compelled Him to stop and do what only He could do . . . bring healing and hope to this man.

Before I pass on, there are several things about this encounter we should not miss. The first concerns the man Himself.

Though physically blind, he had remarkable spiritual sight, not the least because he addresses Jesus using a messianic title: “Jesus, thou Son of David”.

In so doing, he exhibited a spiritual understanding far beyond that of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who, even at this moment, were plotting to kill their messiah.

The second thing we should not miss in this encounter concerns Jesus' responds.

Before healing the man, He asks him,
“What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?”

This seems characteristic of the way Jesus responded to those who came to Him. He inquired and listened. He wanted each to vocalize his need.

No doubt, that remains true for Jesus' followers today – for you and me.

“God bless all the little children of the world” is a noble thought and petition, but how much better it is to say:

“God, provide for the little boy I saw in the park who needs shoes, and use me in bringing him this help.”

Perhaps one Lenten discipline we might want to take on is to avoid vagueness in prayer. Picture Jesus standing before you, asking the question he asked the blind beggar: What do you want me to do?

Spit it out. Don't beat around the bush. Tell Him you need.

But back to love. Jesus did not pass the blind beggar by. Love constrained him to stop and take action.

The thought with which I would like to leave you is this: Cultivate the Christ-like art of noticing. And after noticing respond as the Spirit of God directs you.

Lent is coming.

Give up those chocolates and olives, rutabaga and beer, if you like.

Eat your meatless Lenten meals, take on whatever disciplines you choose, but above all take on love . . . love with hands and feet.

Without it, nothing else counts. All is sound and furry signifying nothing.

