

QUINQUAGESIMA 2010
SERMON - CHRIST CHURCH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

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Faith, Hope, and Love, Saint Paul tells us, are the greatest gifts we have. And the greatest of these gifts is Love!

It's always interesting when secular and Christian observances occur on the same day. Today is both Quinquagesima, the fiftieth day before Easter, and Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is the perfect opportunity to explore the real meaning of Christian Love.

We just heard a reading from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians and it is anything but sentimental. Paul is trying to get the Corinthian Church to stop behaving badly. Partisanship threatened to tear the church apart. Paul's tough words: Stop what you are doing and start acting like people who love each other and who want to do what's right for each other.

Christian Love means always acting for the good of others. In the third century, there was a young priest named Valentine who lived in Rome. It is his feast day we celebrate today. Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. Christians could not come and go as the pleased and many Christians suffered and were martyred under the Roman Emperor Claudius II.

Valentine spent much of his time helping those Christians who were being persecuted. He celebrated Mass and administered the other Sacraments in secret locations. One day, Valentine was caught officiating at a wedding and arrested. He was taken by the police to Claudius himself.

Claudius took a liking to Valentine and tried to convert him to paganism. That didn't work. Instead, Valentine tried to convert Claudius to Christianity, and for his efforts was sentenced to death. On his way to prison, Valentine healed a young girl's blindness. They became close friends and shortly before his execution Valentine sent the world's first Valentine card, which he signed "from your Valentine".

Valentine put his Faith into practice. He shows us that Christian Love never asks the question, "What am I going to get out of doing this?" He served faithfully as a priest to the Christians in Rome. Even on his way to jail, he took the time to heal a young girl's

blindness, just as Jesus healed the blind man in today's Gospel. Neither Jesus nor

Valentine asked who those people were: they simply did what was best for them and healed them.

We come here every week because of our Love for God and each other and our desire to spread the Good News about Jesus and how you can get to know him in Word and Sacrament. None of us will have to face imprisonment or death because we are Christians. Paul, Valentine, and many other early Christians risked getting caught and going to jail every day. But they were sustained by their strong Faith, their hope in everlasting life, and a Love that never dies. They showed their love for others just as much as Jesus showed his love for them. And that is what we want to do.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the Lenten Season. As we focus our eyes, hearts and minds on the cross on the Altar, we will be reminded of the awesome gift of Love Jesus has left for us in his Body and Blood. We will also spend time during Lent taking our spiritual pulse. If we need some guidance we can start with today's Epistle. Paul is writing to us as well as those first century Christians and his message is the same: are you practicing Christian Love like you should?

We need to take some time to look at our relationships with others. We need to take some time to repair broken relationships where possible. Christian Love really does mean saying we are sorry! We need to turn away from those behaviors that separate us from God's Love and from each other.

We need to look at the Cross and let Jesus heal us like he did the blind man? Look to the examples of Paul and Valentine and many early Christians who faced tough times and never gave up their Faith. If we do that, we will begin to see ourselves as God sees us, and not in a fuzzy and distorted way. We will see clearly and we will show we are Christians by our selfless and unconditional love!

Faith, Hope, and Love are the greatest gifts we have. And the greatest of these gifts is Love!

Happy Valentine's Day!

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