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“Caritas Christi Urget Nos”

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (I Cor. 13:4-13)

We have previously reflected on faith and hope and now we reflect on the greatest of the Theological Virtues, Love/Charity. Why is it the greatest? “Because God is Love!” (I Jn. 4:16). When we abide in love, we abide in God. It is defined by the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#) as: “a divinely infused habit, inclining the human will to cherish God for his own sake above all things, and man for the sake of God.” Thus we cannot love until we realize how much we are loved by Him who is Love. This is our starting point. If we learn this, then we will begin to love Him in return.

St. Thomas Aquinas orders our loves in the following way: God, self, neighbor, and body.

So first of all, we are to love God above all things as we hear in [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) – “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole strength.” What does that mean to love or have charity for God? Well, like any relationship, time and energy must be placed into it. We spend time with Him; we talk to Him; we allow God to be our first and last thoughts of the day; we make all of our affections subordinate to our Triune God. That is why I kiss the Altar everyday – it is the Church’s way of remind me to say “I love you Lord Jesus Christ.” I invite you to be conscious of saying “I love you God” everyday, make it conscious and explicit. You have already heard me say many times that during prayer, listen to the Father speak to Christ at the Baptism and Transfiguration, “You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!” Receive these words in your hearts, because God speaks them to us; we are loved by Him who is Love.

Secondly, love or charity to ourselves: St. Thomas is telling us that our individual soul is the most important thing we possess and that we must care for it. We have an immortal treasure –

ourselves – given to us by God and we are called to Love/be charitable to ourselves. This does not imply egomaniacal self-centeredness, but rather an awareness that we must take care of our truest self, namely our spiritual lives. Again make time for God; we must not allow persons or things to lead us away from the spiritual good of our souls. How I beg you to go deep internally. At times, I hear complaints about the seminary’s focus on externals, while they are important because we are public figures and we want to be a “bridge” for others to encounter Christ, hear me tonight when I say that our interior life of union with God is the only thing that truly matters in the end. The exterior is simply the fruit of a deep abiding relationship with God – Go deep! Be able to look in the mirror and see someone who is loveable – who is loved, known, and understood by God. Without this, we will be ministering out of some perverse sense of guilt or need, and we will fail to receive the greatest gift of our lives, God Himself.

Thirdly, Love of Neighbor: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt. 22:40). Notice our Lord commands us to love ourselves, and then our neighbor in a like manner. I bet most of us are better at loving complete strangers! You have come here to learn because you desire to love our brothers and sisters and to serve them in Christian charity. We began tonight with the great litany of love from St. Paul in First Corinthians 13. He gives us the laundry list of what love, charity, *agape* is: patient, kind, not jealous, not pompous, not inflated, not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.” It is the gift of self to others; it is an oblation, a laying down of our lives for our friends in imitation of Christ. It is a death to self; it is being kind to those we don’t like on a natural level; it is loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors. This list could go on and on, and I will speak of a few more particulars in a moment.

But first, let me say a word about the ordering of love once again. The fourth is love of body: We are called to care for our physical well being by getting proper rest, nutrition, and exercise – our bodies, as scripture tells us, are “temples of the Holy Spirit.” Now Aquinas knows that we are hylomorphic beings; he is not trying to set up some dualistic obstacle to confuse us. In fact, his ordering of love makes great sense. In my daily life as a priest I must foster my loving relationship with God above all else, right? And I do this by loving myself enough to be a man of prayer and living in communion with the Trinity in the way I live. Well that means that my priorities are set to love my brothers and sisters above even my physical needs at times, right? That is why St. Maximilian Kolbe could step forward and give up his body/his life for another. He loved God, self, and neighbor first. Because we love, there are times when we will miss a meal, lose some sleep, or have to skip our regularly scheduled exercise. The first thing to go should be “my run” not my Holy Hour; “my comfort” not my desire to be available to serve.

Now brothers, all things in balance – *virtu stat media*. The idea is to keep these four loves balanced and find equilibrium the majority of the time. But the priest who loves his body/physical comfort more than his soul or his people is not going to win any awards for charity – and he certainly is not going to be ready for martyrdom in the way of St. Maximilian – Kolbe’s love of others didn’t begin that day. *Caritas Christi urget nos* – “the love of Christ impels us” (2 Cor 5:14). It is Christ loving through us as we remain in him, as we stay engrafted to the vine – remain in my love!

Now that we have seen a proper ordering of our loves, I want to offer some practical ways for us to be aware of our love/charity for others: fraternal charity; academic charity; and pastoral charity.

Fraternal charity – We must strive to love one another. Priestly fraternity is so important for us. Communal life is not always easy, but like 2 rough stones rubbing up against each other in time they become smooth. Like our biological family, we do not choose our siblings, neither have we chosen each other, but God has made us into a real brotherhood. We may not always like our brother or be his best friend (as is the case in the family), but we are called to love him. Vatican II noted in that there is a “sacramental bond of brotherhood” among priests and that we are called to “form one priestly body. ... Each one is bound to the other members of this priestly body by special links of apostolic love, service, and brotherhood” (PO 8). Pope John Paul II said that “the presbyterate is a *mysterium*” forming a “true family. ... this grace takes up and elevates the human and psychological bonds of affection and friendship, as well as spiritual bonds which exist between priests” (PDV 74). Boy, is this a mystery! Never were more true words spoken. We are a motley crew, but a band of brothers nonetheless. We don’t choose family members! I take great comfort in the call of the Twelve: it never should have worked! Be patient with and truly respect and love one another. Be careful of biting sarcasm that we might think is funny but may be hurtful to the recipient. Humor should never be at the expense of another. Cardinal Dolan is very funny, but it is because of his self deprecating humor. Recently he and Stephen Colbert shared the stage at Fordham University to talk about the joy of our faith. In talking about how the Christian faces the difficulties of life, the Cardinal said, “Hope, not despair; faith, not doubt; love, not spite; light, not an eclipse of the sun; life, not the abyss of death.” As we Irish claim, ‘Life is all about loving, living and laughing, not about hating, dying, and moaning’ (*The Florida Catholic*, 28 September 2012). Indeed, life is about loving. Our home and fraternal living should be about loving. We need to affirm one another, not tear each other down. Try to affirm one brother every day – and thus grow in seeing the good around us. Together, let us destroy the spirit of division with the Holy Spirit of Light and Unity.

Blessed John Paul II reminds us that “This is the way to meet Christ. Go out to meet all of human suffering spurred on by your generosity and with the love that God instills in your hearts by means of the Holy Spirit: ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ ([Mt 25:40](#)). **The world is in urgent need of a great prophetic sign of fraternal charity!** It is not enough to ‘speak’ of Jesus. We must also let him be ‘seen’ somehow through the eloquent witness of our own life (cf. [NMI](#), 16)” (Message for World Youth Day 2004).

I have a deep sense that great good is occurring in our house, this past weekend alone was filled with fraternity, laughter, camaraderie, and love: from the Tough Mudder to our Donor Mass and Brunch the day couldn’t have been brighter right before our darkest night. I could not sleep well that night (unusual for me!), I laid awake dozing on and off praying my rosary. In the middle of the night my iphone docking station started making strange noises further disturbing my night. Obviously something was happening in our house, and only in retrospect do I see that my own spirit was restless. I understand that I am not alone and that others had an equally disturbing night – in hindsight it is because a member of our community was hurting and there was a spiritual battle going on and by God’s grace and the bond of friendship our brother lives! But notice how hard the evil one is trying to destroy the good we are doing at SVDP. **He will not win because Christ is the victor at this seminary. We will not allow the “enemy of our human nature” to prevail – Christ is our King and we claim and consecrate every person both on and off this campus for Him!**

Sitting in Dr. Garcia’s class last week, he gave us a wonderful phrase to reflect upon: *Numquam amavo satis* – “We will never love enough” – and similarly St. John of the Cross wrote “I cannot

love as much as I have been loved” (*Dark Night*, 39). How true these phrases are, we always love imperfectly here on earth, but by staying connected to God, He makes up for our defects. When I left my first assignment after 4 years I remember being with my Youth Group Core Team at a dinner for them to say “thank you.” They went around the table telling funny stories and favorite moments, and then a husband and wife, whose teens had all been involved in our group who I was not particularly close to, said “we want to thank you for ‘being love’ to us.” Me? Who loves so imperfectly and selfishly? The truth is that God makes up for our defects when we are sincere in trying to love, and I guess that is what he did through me for that family. *Numquam amavo satis!* I hope you know that as rector/spiritual father of this house I truly love you, albeit imperfectly, but sincerely nonetheless. The faculty likewise is here out of love for you – you are our parishioners, our future brother priests, indeed you are God’s children who we strive to love. *Numquam amavo satis!* “We will never love enough!”

We are each imperfect and come here with our own hurts and baggage. We must all learn to surrender it all to the Lord so that we can grow in love and charity, or else our hurts will one day hurt the people of God. We only hurt ourselves when we do not forgive and let go. Msgr. Cippel taught me that “Hurt people, hurt people!” Even in the Church! We are to love and have compassion on those who have hurt us because most likely they are deeply wounded: it might be a bishop, pastor, rector, professor, vocation director, fellow seminarian, sister, parishioner, parish manager, etc. Don’t confuse the personnel of the Church with the Person of the Church. If you are thinking “I can’t do it” forgiveness and healing is out of my grasp. You may be right, so allow Christ to do it. Philippians 4:13 reminds us that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!” The longest journey is from the head to the heart! Let it go! Be healed! Be at Peace! Knowing our own weakness and sinfulness also gives us compassion for others. As St. Phillip Neri would say: “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Thus we must learn both to grow in fraternal charity and in fraternal forgiveness. Our identity is in Christ and nothing or no one can take that away from us. When someone says something hurtful to you, in charity stand up to them and let them know it and then forgive them from your heart. That is the Christian way. (Use example of 1 Samuel 24).

Pope Benedict XVI on his Apostolic Journey to the United States said to the Bishops (4/16/09): “There is a need for all of us to move beyond sterile divisions, disagreements and preconceptions, and to listen together to the voice of the Spirit who is guiding the Church into a future of hope. Each of us knows how important priestly fraternity has been in our lives. That fraternity is not only a precious possession, but also an immense resource for the renewal of the priesthood and the raising up of new vocations. I would close by encouraging you to foster opportunities for ever greater dialogue and fraternal encounter among your priests, and especially the younger priests. I am convinced that this will bear great fruit for their own enrichment, for the increase of their love for the priesthood and the Church, and for the effectiveness of their apostolate.”

Fraternal charity and please God future Presbyteral Communion is a “gift from God” but it is also a choice (cf. Fr. Gallaro, *The Priest*, December 2008, 14-20). Every day we must chose to love those around us. “How can we say we love the God we cannot see when we do not love the brother that we can see?” (cf. 1 Jn. 4:20). Over our Tabernacle are the words of St. Augustine: *O Sacramentum Pietatis! O Signum Unitatis! O Vinculum Caritatis!* (Homily on the Gospel of St. John [26, 6, 13]). Those last two phrases need to be mantras for us “O Sign of Unity and Bond of Charity!” The Eucharist binds us together in love – let us be united in mind and heart like the early Church living in deep personal communion with Christ and one another (cf. Acts 2:42).

One last dynamic which I must touch upon is charity in the Classroom. I wish to offer a few observations that I would ask each of you to be attentive to. My classroom observations this semester have brought a few things to mind, and really it is all about charity. Ready? Be on time, it is rude and uncharitable to walk in late (email F.A. and prof). Imagine the surprised faces I see when I am in the back of the class – my presence shouldn't make any difference. Please bring the professor's notes and appropriate texts to class, i.e. bring a Bible for scripture class! If using a computer, use it for class: to use it for anything else, especially playing games, is to be lacking in charity for the professor and for the people of God who are paying for your studies. Please have reverence and respect for our faculty when asking questions. The virtue of humility is a great gift and a sign of Christian maturity and charity. The men and women who teach here have dedicated their lives to the Church and possess doctorates and licenses in their field of expertise. An accusatory tone can be deeply offensive or wounding. At times I have even heard of seminarians at some seminaries declaring heresy (not here of course!). The flip side of this coin of course is that we recognize that there is no such thing as a perfect professor or institution. Theologians have their own hang-ups or novelties that they hang on to – trust me, I had my share of professors with such idiosyncrasies. Why am I saying this? Who is the person most responsible for your learning? You are! Each of us as individuals owes it to the people of God out of love and charity to do our best to learn. Don't depend on others to spoon feed you all of the material. Make sure that your reading and research augments your coursework.

I certainly could go on and on, and you know at a later time I will speak of pastoral charity – our call to love the flock entrusted to our care as good shepherds formed after the heart of Christ.

But for now I wish to close with the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians as a reminder to us that “all that we do with our love is wasted.”

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing” (I Cor. 13:1-3).

Advent is the season of Charity, may we love and give the gift of Christ to all those around us.

For an increase in the Theological Virtue of Charity, we pray “Hail Mary ...”

For the spiritual protection of our seminary, we pray “St. Michael the Archangel ...”