



The Sunday called Quinquagesima, or the  
Sunday next before Lent.

*The Collect.*

**O** LORD who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

The love mentioned in this Collect is not just that charity gives 'things' to others, but that gives more than things – it gives self. This is divine love and it comes from God, not as a demand, but as a grant to all who love Him. It is impossible to love God and not love others – and we love Him because He first loved us. How can it be that our love comes from God? Have you ever taken a walk on a clear summer night on the beach? Did you walk in the moon light? No, technically, you did not, even if the moon was very bright with its soft glow. You actually walked in the **SUNLIGHT**. The light of the moon is only the sunlight it receives from the Sun in smaller measure, and reflects that sunlight to the beach. That is how the real love that we give to others actually is God's love. What is this divine grant of love? *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.* (1 John 4:10-11) Christ commands it, and love is evidence of our faith. *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* (John 13:34-35) This is an imposing commandment of Christ's, that we love one another as He loved us! That is a very high measure of love, for Christ loved us so greatly that He died for us. How much do we now love one another? Does your love measure up? No, it most probably does not, but it SHOULD. Our righteousness, too, falls short, but it should not. It is because of our falling short in righteousness, in love, and in faith, that Christ is our Mediator.

Today's Collect in Quinquagesima is the last before the Lenten Season which will begin on Wednesday, 13 February 2013. Lent is a time for humble reflection, prayer and fasting in contemplation of that love that Christ demonstrated and proved for us in dying to redeem us from our sins. It is not a time of **boasting** of our piety by wearing smudges of ashes on our faces. *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee*

*openly.* (Matt 6:16-18) Friends, please clear your hearts and minds for the present moment of all previous prejudices you have entertained resulting from the false teachings of the Romanizing Oxford Movement adherents, and ask yourself if smearing ashes on your forehead on Ash Wednesday is consistent with the clear counsel of Christ in the above passage, and elsewhere? Is it not better to honor God with our obedience to His Word, then to honor men by their dreamt-up traditions? Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, our great English Reformer, was burned at the stake for refusing such foolish traditions of men and for honoring God's Word. He forbade the use of ashes applied to the forehead and so do all who will honor Christ.

We read in the beautiful LOVE chapter of the Bible (1 Corinthians 13) on Quinquagesima Sunday that of the three cardinal virtues of faith, hope and charity, the greatest of these three is Love (Charity). Love is patient because it is eternal. Without love, we are waking dead (zombies, if you will). And you *hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.... But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2:1, 4-6) Have we not been told that love covereth all sins? (see Proverbs 10:12) And we see that the prayer of this Collect clearly illustrates this fact: "*.....all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee.*" This is one Collect Prayer that did not have its source in the ancient church, but was composed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer himself. The former Collect, which his replaces, alluded to the absolution of sins on Shrove Tuesday (our sins being shriven from us). "Our (English) Reformers believed that such outward observances (including application of Ashes) fall short of what we might call "religion of the heart." Thus Cranmer created a new Collect (prayer) based on the Epistle which would follow, St Paul's hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13." (**The Collects of Thomas Cranmer**, Barbee & Zahl)

God is LOVE! He shares that love to all who respond to that call of grace which the LORD has placed in our hearts. He loved us so much that He gave His only Begotten Son a Ransom for us while we were yet enemies of God. The Lord suffered humiliation and suffering on the cross out of His Love for the Father...and for us. Love is the essence of the Christian walk. If we handle God's Word harshly, even if we speak it truly, where is the evidence of that LOVE we are supposed to share of God? When love is abundantly present among a people, how can there be wars among them? If LOVE is abundantly present, how can we intentionally offend another, or defraud him or her? If our love of God exceeds all other considerations in our lives, how could we ever act in ways that dishonor His magnificent Name? Every other Godly virtue has its foundation in love.

Now, my friends, as we prepare for the solemnity of Lenten observance, let us subdue our fleshly passions and exalt that Godly virtue of LOVE as we contemplate that very LOVE that transcends the great space between Heaven and earth, time and Eternity, and came from the Ivory Palaces of the Father to lay down His life for you and me on a cruel cross at Calvary.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN

