

Charity: The Highest Virtue

By Deacon Tim Sullivan

Of the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, the greatest of these is charity. 1 Corinthians 13:13.

The virtue of charity is not just being nice to people. It's not just giving to the poor. It's not a preoccupation with social justice.

As the Catechism says, "Charity is the virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God." Charity is imitating the love of Jesus which we have received and taken into our hearts.

The Christian virtue of charity, then, is synonymous with love. It's the love of God for us, revealed to us by Jesus in His sacrifice of his very life for our salvation. By our belief in Jesus Christ as our Savior and especially through the Eucharist, the love of Jesus becomes present in us and gives us the power and grace to love others as Jesus has loved us. It's as if the love of Jesus dwells in us and is passed through us to others.

Jesus gives us a new commandment: "That you love one another as I have loved you." Just as the love of Jesus is offered to everyone, so must our love be extended to all, even our enemies. And our love is not dependent on how people respond to us. It is not to be irritable or resentful, but is to bear all things and endure all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

"Our Lord does not so much look at the greatness of our actions, or even at their difficulty, as at the love with which we do them." "I feel that when I am charitable it is Jesus alone who acts in me; the more I am united to Him the more do I love others." Saint Therese of Lisieux