

## *Quinquagesima Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins*

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People get the warm fuzzies from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13, and it remains a most popular passage of Scripture among unbelievers. But I want to suggest to you another way of hearing and reading those beautiful words of Saint Paul. You are completely out of tune, a blowhard; everything you speak is just endless noise. More than that, you are nothing, and your life and accomplishments and abilities are worthless.

You see, we often wrongly assume that all the great things Paul is saying are about us. But are they? Can we pretend to be so patient, gentle, long-suffering, humble and meek, honest, kind and good?

The first way I want to suggest to you of using this chapter is as a means of self-examination. St. Paul makes us look behind and underneath our words and thoughts and deeds, to our motive, to their source and end in our hearts. That chapter then provides us all with a measuring stick, with a glorious standard by which to judge our own Christian maturity. St. Paul shows

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how charity is opposed to all envy, pride, anger and malice. For charity or love is just this: good will. So that chapter makes us ask ourselves, “Am I long-suffering, kind, humble and meek, selfless, gentle, pure, honest, true, patient, full of faith and hope, persevering?”

You see that is not a description of you or me; rather it is a standard by which we may know our own lack of love. But it does describe someone. That charity is found and has shown itself perfectly in Jesus Christ and in his suffering, death and resurrection. First Corinthians 13 is a description of Jesus. And for us, the definition of love is the cross of Jesus Christ. Our Lord tells his twelve and us about this journey of love, which he undertakes willingly for us. There in his passion, in his suffering and death, we see and know long-suffering and kindness. He did not envy, but rather emptied himself for us. He humbled himself and made a sinless, selfless sacrifice for the sins of the whole selfish world. Charity is not easily provoked - look to his cross and passion. Charity beareth all things - the mocking and spitting and scourging. Charity believeth and hopeth all things - Jesus committed himself into the Father’s hands and promised

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Paradise to the penitent thief. Charity endureth all things and never faileth, even suffering and dying. And what, or who, rose again triumphant? Love eternal, Christ our Lord.

So when we hear the sublime words of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13, we think of Jesus' great love wherewith he loved us. We only know what love really is by his cross and passion. Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. One of the Churches I attended at Seminary has "God so loved the world" written across the top of the altar. But it is there in Latin, which reads a little differently: "So God delights in the world." This is the message and meaning of the cross and passion of Jesus, and of our Lenten journey to Jerusalem, the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 is a Christian text, and when Paul speaks of love he preaches nothing else but Christ crucified. For there is no greater love than this, than the love of God, that love which lays down his own life for his friends. Greater love has no man than this, and in this God's supreme love is known and shown.

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“What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” Jesus asks. We might well answer, “More love to thee O Christ, more love to thee.” The twelve are blind but do not know it or admit it, or beg for healing. They cannot see the meaning of his suffering and death, the love of God in it, for them. But this beggar, he has no pretensions. He will admit his need and he will beg Christ’s mercy. And so his eyes are opened, he receives his sight, and what does he see, but the love of Christ, then face to face. We need to have our eyes opened, that we may begin to grasp the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ. What are those dimensions, but the dimensions of the cross of Jesus himself - reaching out to all of us, reaching out to you.

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem. It is of course first of all the journey of Jesus for us, to the cross. But we are invited to follow him: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem. We are invited to follow him in love. If 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 provides us with a means of knowing our own lack of love, and also Christ’s infinite love, it finally shows us the love of Christ that may be in us by the Holy Spirit. For the love of God is in our hearts, only by the gift of the Holy Spirit. This charity, which is a free love,

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a gifted love, is a virtue infused and inspired by God, who by his Spirit is remaking us into the likeness of Jesus. The prayer of the Church today is: Send thy Holy Spirit. So we pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may be fulfilled with God's grace and heavenly blessing. Let us then pray to the Father, through Jesus his Son and our Saviour, that he would send his Holy Spirit into our hearts and fill us with most excellent gift, charity - with his love, with love for him, for our neighbours and for ourselves, without which we are spiritually dead.

Behold we go up to Jerusalem. In the forty days of Lent, we shall make that journey to Jerusalem with Jesus, to witness his passion and death. But Jerusalem above is our final destination, and we pass through Jerusalem below on our way there. We begin this forty-day journey thinking about love. Lent is the School of love. Love is the door into Lent and the door out of it. Today we are reminded that without love, we are as good as dead. On Maundy Thursday, we will hear again his commandment to love one another, as we behold how he has loved us, in both lowly service and in supreme sacrifice.

The goal of all our Lent must be this growth in the love of

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God, by drawing nearer to Jesus, and by the indwelling of the holy Spirit.

The end of our Christian life is simply this: to be in love with Jesus. That means to be in the Holy Spirit with Jesus, caught up into the very life of the Trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.