Charity

To Love as God Loves

It is deeply compelling to know that we received three supernatural gifts in Baptism that bring us into relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – God Himself! These gifts are faith, hope and charity. **Faith** is the gift "by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us… because God is truth itself" (CCC paragraph 1814). **Hope** is the gift by which we are enabled to trust Jesus' promises, relying not on our own strength but on the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. (see CCC 1817). **Charity** is "the theological virtue by which we love God above all things" because of who He is, and "our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God" (CCC 1822).

Jesus "raised the bar" for us and instituted something **new** in calling us to "Love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) In loving us by giving the totality of Himself for us on the Cross, Jesus obtained for us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live out this call to love ourselves and our neighbor. This is the very heart of the Christian life.

The supernatural virtue of charity transforms our limited human love into divine love. It enables us to unite our hearts with Christ who gave His life for us, to forgive our enemies and to serve those in need without expecting anything in return. Without charity, faith and hope lose their power; but with charity, all things hold together in perfect harmony (Col 3:14).

Few people embodied this truth more beautifully than Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Albania, she heard the call to serve the poorest of the poor. She founded the Missionaries of Charity, whose members vow to serve those who suffer the most—seeing Christ Himself in each face. "It is being unwanted," she once said, "that is the worst disease any human being can experience."

For Mother Teresa, charity was not a theory or feeling, it was action. She saw Jesus in every person, especially the poor, the sick, and the forgotten. "Show love to others," she said, "as you would show your love directly to Jesus Christ." Her life revealed that charity is not sentiment, but willing the good of another, to act with mercy and compassion, loving even when it costs, even "until it hurts."

Mother Teresa's love was expressed in tender service, in feeding the hungry, comforting the dying, and upholding human dignity. When awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, she canceled the banquet so the money could feed fifteen thousand poor people. She knew that love "is worth nothing unless it is given freely."

Mother Teresa once said, "We all thirst for love." That thirst is a reflection of God's own desire for us. On the Cross, Christ stretched out His arms to embrace the whole world; perfect love poured out "until it hurt." When we practice charity, we share in that same divine love.

The Apostle Paul captures the essence of what it means to live with charity: *"Charity is patient and kind, is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Charity does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails*." (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Let us ask the Lord to increase in us the supernatural virtue of charity: to see Christ in others, to forgive those who wrong us, and to give ourselves in humble service. Then our lives, like Mother Teresa's, will become living reflections of God's boundless love, and we will know the **JOY** that is complete in Him. This is to say, we will experience the joy of the Lord that far surpasses any suffering or sacrifice we make in serving others in love.

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