

Reading: 1st Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Brothers and sisters:

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.

But I shall show you a still more excellent way.

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.

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.

Gospel: Luke 7:31-35

Jesus said to the crowds:

“To what shall I compare the people of this generation?

What are they like?

They are like children who sit in the marketplace and call to one another,

‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance.

We sang a dirge, but you did not weep.’

For John the Baptist came neither eating food nor drinking wine,
and you said, ‘He is possessed by a demon.’

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said,

‘Look, he is a glutton and a drunkard,

a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’

But wisdom is vindicated by all her children.”

Homily Transcription: *This I Believe*

This I Believe is an international organization that encourages people to write essays on core beliefs of their life. They partnered a number of years ago with NPR Radio in a series of essays that were broadcast over four years to much critical acclaim.

Today we hear a poetic essay from St. Paul Chapter 12 in his Letter to the Corinthians on the core belief of what we hold dear as Catholic Christians. This passage, even after 2000 years is among the most beautiful and inspiring passages in the entire Bible. As you know, and I'm sure you've witnessed this many times it's often chosen at weddings, and it's a favorite text to meditate on during retreats. It's a Go-To passage when we become discouraged. It provides a beautiful description of what it means to love.

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.

Fr. Michael Sparough, SJ Homily Transcription *This I Believe*

To love not just in words, but in deeds. To love, not just from our hearts but to let that love flow into the daily actions of our lives. This is fundamental to who we are as Catholic Christians. It's a clarion call to live a life radically centered in love.

You may be surprised to know that the Catholic Church doesn't teach that belief in Jesus is necessary for salvation. Yes, all humans can only be saved by Christ, but explicit faith in Christ is not necessary for salvation. That was defined quite explicitly in the Vatican II declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration on world religions.

If God is love, as 1 John 4 asserts, then the pathway to union with God is love. St. Paul ends today's reading by stating that three things last – faith, hope, and love. BUT THE GREATEST IS LOVE. Love is greater than faith.

If that's true, then why belong to a church, why go to Mass, why study the faith? Is all this necessary for salvation? The Church says no, it isn't necessary. But it is the greatest help to living a loving life that we can receive.

Let's stop thinking of Church as obligation, and more as one of the greatest gifts that Christ has left us to live a life of love.

Love, true love, always involves sacrifice. Sacrifice: Giving up one good for the sake of a greater good. To love someone is to want what is best for them, and to be willing to sacrifice our own wants, desires, and needs for the sake of the other is the essence of love.

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.

Love is never easy.

Jesus uses the image of the grain of wheat falling to the ground as an image of how we learn to love, we lose our petty, small selves when we dedicate ourselves to helping others. This, as I said, is never easy and the Church and our Catholic Christian faith, is so necessary to keep us on the right path. Even when the leaders of our Church fail us, Christ has promised He will never abandon us.

Haven't you felt the strength that comes from this holy Eucharist?

Haven't you been consoled and challenged as you read and meditate on these life affirming words from the Holy Scripture?

Fr. Michael Sparough, SJ Homily Transcription *This I Believe*

Haven't you been inspired to want to become the best version of yourself as you learn more and more about the holy example of all the saints?

Participation in the Church may not be necessary for salvation but it is the greatest help that I know of to remain true to our fundamental mission on earth – to become a person of love.

...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...

When we learn to love – really love – God who created us and our neighbor as ourselves, then I believe we are fulfilling the purpose for which we are created.

Love heals the sin sick soul. Love lifts us out of depression. Love gives us a vision of a life worth living. Love, real love, true love, has its source and summit in God. God inspires us to love, enables us to love, sustains us in love.

Can we love without our Christian faith? Some can, perhaps. But it's so much harder.

We gather here day after day, week after week, year after year, because we want to grow into the people of love that God has created us to be.

And here's the irony, the more loving we become, the more aware we are of our own sinfulness of our own lack of love. The less loving we are, the more blind we are to our own sin.

Our faith helps to keep us focused on what is most important. It protects us from discouragement; inspires us so we can keep on reaching out in love, even when that love is not returned.

Let me end with a passage that I have often quoted, but like any great wisdom, we need to return to it again and again to help us absorb it.

It's a quote attributed to Father Pedro Arrupe, the former superior general of the Jesuits:

Nothing is more practical than finding God. That is than falling in love in a quite absolute, final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.

Amen? Amen.