

- At the beginning of this year I mentioned that, as part of our celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, we – as a parish – would focus on practicing a particular virtue each month as well as 1 or 2 of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
- So hopefully throughout this month of January you’ve been striving for the virtue of humility and practicing the spiritual work of mercy of forgiving all injuries, as I suggested several weeks ago.
- As humility is the seedbed and requisite virtue for obtaining any of the other virtues, it seemed to me to be most appropriate virtue to begin with.
- But as we move into the next month, I encourage you to practice the greatest of the virtues: charity. For just as humility is a virtue that all of us must earnestly seek out, so too is charity a virtue that we won’t want to be without on Judgment Day.
- It’s for this reason that, when we had the virtues painted atop the pilasters here in the church that I had “humility” and “charity” painted on these front-most pilasters where they are easily seen by all as ever frequent reminders of their importance.
- Of all the virtues that we should be striving to make habitual within ourselves, it is these two more than any other that I want us all to possess.
- As for our works of mercy for the month of February, I ask all of you to practice the corporal works of mercy of feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty.
- In just a couple of weeks a group of us from our parish will be flying to India for our annual parish mission trip to do these very things. And so one of the ways you can practice these works of mercy is by supporting our mission trip.
- If you would like to make a donation that we take with us over to India to help take care of the needs of the poor folks we’ll be working with there, you can either give a donation to me or drop it off in the parish office.
- Donating to our semi-monthly food collection is another great way to perform these works of mercy, as is volunteering to prepare and serve meals at a homeless shelter.
- Of course simply preparing meals for your own loved ones with great love and care can also be a way to perform these works of mercy. So try to do these things this month!
- As for the virtue of charity, we are given a great primer on this highest of the virtues in our second reading today from St. Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians.
- In this beautiful passage the good St. Paul spells out for us in detail the qualities of true love, true charity, namely that it is patient, kind, not jealous or pompous, not inflated or rude, nor does it seek its own interests.
- True love is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury. On the contrary, St. Paul tells us that Christian charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. It never fails.
- To best understand the virtue of charity, it’s good to turn to St. Thomas Aquinas – whom I spoke about briefly last Sunday.
- You’ll notice in our mural that as he stands adoring our Lord with quill and book, St. Thomas is depicted with a sunburst over his heart, which symbolizes his great wisdom.
- As I mentioned last Sunday, St. Thomas conformed both his mind and heart to Christ, and thus he was filled with a supernatural wisdom that has served the Church well!

- In his wisdom St. Thomas Aquinas teaches us that charity is the highest of the virtues because it 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.
- When we exercise true charity, we are acting solely out of love of God and neighbor rather than seeking any type of reward.
- Charity recognizes the true needs of others and seeks to provide them, even at a cost to oneself. True charity encompasses a willingness to suffer for the one who is loved. As Jesus Himself taught us, no greater love hath a man than to lay down his life for a friend.
- While charity is often well directed when it meets the physical needs of others – such as by providing food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty – charity reaches its highest form when it is directed toward helping another on the road to salvation.
- Of course our Lord's death on the cross is the supreme act of charity this world has ever known, which is why "Charity" is painted on the pilaster to which the crucifix is affixed. By His suffering and death, we've received the greatest gift: forgiveness for our sins.
- One of the most important lines from St. Paul that we hear today in our second reading is that true love does not rejoice over wrong-doing but rather rejoices with the truth.
- And this is something with which St. Thomas Aquinas whole-heartedly agreed: love and truth can never be separated but must necessarily go hand-in-hand.
- The point here is that charity is not truly charitable if it is not grounded in or does not reflect truth. For charity to be charity, it must conform to the objective reality of truth.
- And practicing the virtue of charity sometimes means that we will have to speak the truth to others, even when it's difficult to do so.
- Sometimes true love requires doing or saying the hard thing. We see this evidenced by our Lord in today's Gospel when He rebukes the people of Nazareth for their lack of faith.
- The point is that true love, true Christian charity, is not a sentimental feeling but an act of the reason and the will that reflects a conformity to truth. Thus, it often requires sacrifice, courage, and a willingness to suffer for the sake of the one who is loved.
- As St. Paul says: true Christian love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Being truly charitable often hurts, just as I'm sure those nails hurt our Lord when He was crucified.
- As we consider practicing the virtue of charity this month, I'd like to suggest that you try to practice charity in a way that is difficult for you, in a way that "pinches" a bit.
- Perhaps it's having a conversation with an adult child who has walked away from the Faith or who is living a morally compromising lifestyle, or being kind to a difficult in-law who's visiting, or being patient with an elderly parent.
- Maybe it's volunteering more or giving more to charity. Maybe it's by doing volunteer work that you know is good to do but puts you outside of your comfort zone.
- We can all find something we need to do as an act of charity that is difficult, and so I encourage you to do it this month. For we grow in the virtue of charity all the more quickly when we push ourselves to do that which we find hardest!
- Spend some time in prayer first and ask our Lord for His grace. He'll give it to you. Our Lord is always pleased when we are willing to suffer in order to be charitable.
- My brothers and sisters, our Lord has shown us the supreme act of charity by dying for us on the cross. May we imitate Him well by being willing to practice the virtue of charity, most especially when it hurts.