

- Speaking on the critical importance of self-knowledge for growing in the spiritual life, it was St. Augustine who said: “This is the perfection of man, to find out his own imperfections.”
- Truly, if we wish to become another Christ – as we are called to be by our baptism – then we must know the ways in which we fail. In other words, we must know our own personal obstacles to being like Christ. We must be able to see our faults and not be blind to them.
- Our Gospel today speaks to us of blindness. Jesus asks: “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?” He then asks us further: “Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eyes, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?”
- The ultimate question here is whether we see ourselves as we truly are. Can we see the beams hanging out of our eyes, or are we blind to our faults and sins?
- Do we have enough spiritual vision to know that we need our Lord’s mercy, like the blind man who sat alongside the road to Jericho? This is certainly something to pray for as we prepare for Lent!
- In the ancient calendar of the Church, today is known as Quinquagesima Sunday, which is the last of a triptych of Sundays that prepares us for the penitential season of Lent.
- This preparatory period began two Sundays ago with Septuagesima Sunday. *Septuagesima* literally means “70th,” a symbolic reference to the number of days before Easter. Last Sunday was *Sexagesima Sunday* (“60th”), and then today is *Quinquagesima Sunday* (“50th”).
- And, of course, on Ash Wednesday we will formally enter into Lent, which in Latin is called: *Quadragesima*, which means “40th” – referring to the 40 days of Lent.
- These pre-Lenten Sundays that we began in the Latin Mass two weeks ago are meant to prepare us for the discipline of Lent, while also marking a transition from the glories of the Christmas cycle to the more solemn and yet so very necessary penitential season of Lent.
- As we prepare to enter Lent, we must realize that Lent isn’t simply about fasting or giving up things we enjoy. It’s not simply about repenting from our sins.
- At its core Lent is about becoming more like Christ, which is why we must strive for self-knowledge about our faults and sins.
- But as we attain knowledge of our faults and failings and repent of our sins, there is still much more to do! We must also grow in virtue, most especially the virtue of charity!
- The Lenten triumvirate of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are our tools for growing in charity and becoming more like Christ!
- Growing in charity is a matter of learning to love as Christ loves: fully, generously, without concern for self, but rather willing the good of others. In many ways it begins with our speech.
- Our first reading from Sirach takes up this thought. Sirach tells us that our speech often reveals our faults and discloses the bent of our mind.
- So, as we prepare to enter Lent, perhaps we should begin by looking at our speech. Do we regularly judge or disparage others in our conversations? Do we gossip, are we quarrelsome, or are we quick to criticize when things don’t go our way?
- All these sins are offenses against charity, and a sure obstacle to becoming more like Christ. Yet, it’s not enough simply to speak the right things. We must also act with charity.

- So, beyond our speech, do we bear good fruit by our actions? Think of our Lord's words in the Gospel today: "A good tree does not bear rotten fruit, nor does a rotten tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit."
- "A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good, but an evil person out of a store of evil produces evil."
- With this in mind, are we generous with our gifts of time, talent, and treasure? Or do we lie, cheat, and steal? Do we practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, or are we more focused on making our own lives comfortable?
- To best understand authentic Christian charity, it's good to turn to St. Paul's magnificent primer on love found in the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians.
- It is here that St. Paul teaches us the essential qualities of the virtue of charity. He tells us: *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.*
- That's a lot to take in, and I certainly recommend that you meditate on this important chapter of Scripture as you prepare yourself for Lent.
- For the past two Sundays I've spoken a bit about dealing with injustice and the malice of enemies. The point is that the virtue of charity – if it is to be truly Christ-like – must extend especially to our enemies.
- Even when people are hurting us or persecuting us, we must look beyond their sins and injustices against us so that we can enter into their suffering with them.
- Just as we must look beyond the bread and wine we receive at Holy Communion to see our Lord present in the Eucharist, so, too, must we look with the eyes of faith beyond the faults and failings of others to see the goodness present in them.
- When we can do that, when we are able to love even our enemies as our Lord counsels us to do, that is when our love becomes God-like. It is then that we really begin to turn away from ourselves and begin living our lives selflessly.
- Brothers and sisters, we are about to enter the holy season of Lent: a time of increased prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It's a time of overcoming the blindness of sin so that we can see our faults and failings for what they are.
- Ultimately, Lent should be a time of growing in the virtue of charity and becoming more like Christ, Who Is Love Incarnate.
- May we always speak charitably, act charitably, and love all we meet just like Christ, especially our enemies and those who hate us.
- And when Easter morning dawns in 7 week's time, may we find that our sinful ways have been crucified so that we might resemble more the risen Christ.