

- St. Margaret of Cortona, a 13th century saint from Italy, lost her mother at the age of 7. Her father remarried soon after, but Margaret and her stepmother were not able to get along, especially as Margaret grew more rebellious and lascivious in her teenage years.
- Eventually, Margaret ran off with a young knight named Arsenio, and though they were not married, Margaret moved into his family's castle with him and bore him a son.
- One day when she was awaiting his return, Arsenio's dog showed up at the door, and Margaret followed the dog into the woods where she found Arsenio's murdered body.
- The shock of Arsenio's violent death converted Margaret on the spot. Seeing the mortal blows on his murdered body made her realize the spiritual danger she had been living in.
- So Margaret left Arsenio's home, giving up all her worldly goods, and returned to her father's home – with her young son in tow – to beg forgiveness.
- Sadly, the shame Margaret's actions had brought upon her father and stepmother prevailed in their hearts, and they refused to take in Margaret and her son, forcing her to seek help from some Franciscan friars in nearby Cortona, where she would spend the rest of her life.
- They were given shelter; Margaret's son went to school and eventually became a Franciscan friar. Guided by these good Franciscans, Margaret spent the rest of her life serving the poor to atone for her sins. She became a model of prayer, penance, and Christian charity.
- Knowing how she had misspent love in her shameful past, this second Magdalene learned through penance and prayer how to love with purity of heart; to love as Christ loves us all.
- At her death at the age of 50, Margaret was publicly declared a saint, although she wasn't formally canonized for another 400 years.
- Curiously, despite her sinful youth, St. Margaret of Cortona's body is incorrupt, which is peculiar since almost every other incorrupt saint was a virgin. Yet she, whom we look to as a patroness of fallen women, is incorrupt like great virgins such as Sts. Bernadette and Therese.
- Though she carelessly threw away her purity in her youth, I believe Margaret's incorrupt body is proof of the renewing effects of true charity.
- I believe that her practice of loving others as Christ loves us all not only atoned for her sins but actually renewed Margaret's purity. Though she suffered for some years with lustful temptations, she was able to move beyond those temptations through her charitable works.
- What we find in the life of St. Margaret of Cortona is that practicing true charity, which is the highest virtue, forms us in all the other virtues. It restores us and makes us like Christ.
- In our Gospel today our Lord says to us: "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As have loved you, so you also should love one another."
- These beautiful words spoken by our Lord took place at the Last Supper after Jesus had just washed the feet of the apostles, and Judas – in his betrayal – had just gone off into the darkness of the night and the darkness of his sin.
- Although the apostles didn't know it at the time, in today's Gospel Jesus is teaching them for the last time. So you can imagine the importance of these words. He knows His time on earth is short, and so Jesus tells them what He wants them to remember most after He's gone.
- In one sense Jesus is preparing his Apostles for His death, His Ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. At this point in the Easter season, the liturgy is beginning to foreshadow the great mysteries that lie ahead in the coming weeks.

- Yet, at this critical moment, what is it that Jesus wants His closest followers to remember most? To love: to love as He Himself has loved us.
- As we look upon the cross, our greatest symbol of love, we see that Christ loved us even unto death. He loved us by giving Himself fully to us: body, blood, soul and divinity – as a sacrifice on Calvary for the atonement of our sins.
- In this way, the cross gives us great insight into the nature of genuine love. Specifically, Jesus' death on the cross shows us that at the heart of genuine love is sacrifice.
- To truly love someone, you must be willing to give of yourself. There can be no love without the gift of self, without some form of sacrifice.
- Having a fondness for someone without the willingness to sacrifice is mere human affection. And while human affection is good and wonderful, it's not love. All genuine love requires a willingness to give until it hurts and to die to oneself.
- And so for those of us who wish to be known as followers of Christ, it is incumbent upon us to form our hearts with a willingness to suffer and sacrifice for others. Our lives should be marked by some measure of a penitential spirit – as was St. Margaret of Cortona's.
- Yet, loving like Christ – loving with the willingness to suffer and sacrifice – should not be viewed as a hardship as much as it is an investment! Loving this way restores and renews us!
- In his treatise on John's Gospel, St. Augustine asks why our Lord calls loving one another a *new* commandment. And Augustine reasons that our Lord said this because learning to love as Christ loves has the capacity to renew us.
- As Augustine puts it: "When we love as [Christ] loved us, we become new men, heirs of the new covenant and singers of the new song." He says:
- *From the entire human race throughout the world this love gathers together into one body a new people, to be the bride of God's only Son. She is the bride of whom it is asked in the Song of Songs: 'Who is this who comes clothed in white?' White indeed are her garments, for she has been made new; and the source of her renewal is none other than this new commandment.*
- When we love sacrificially, as Christ did, we become members of the new Jerusalem St. John speaks of in our 2nd reading: that "holy city," "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," our former selves having passed away. We are renewed, just as St. Margaret of Cortona was.
- Brothers and sisters, our blessed Lord has given us a new commandment of love: that we each learn to love one another as He loves us: unconditionally, with a servant's heart, with a willingness to suffer for those whom we love.
- Loving as Christ loves us all is the very best way for us to be prepared for what lies ahead in the world to come. May we be converted away from sin, all impurity, all that is not of God, and be renewed, restored, and fashioned into an image of Christ through our practice of charity.
- St. Margaret of Cortona, pray for us.