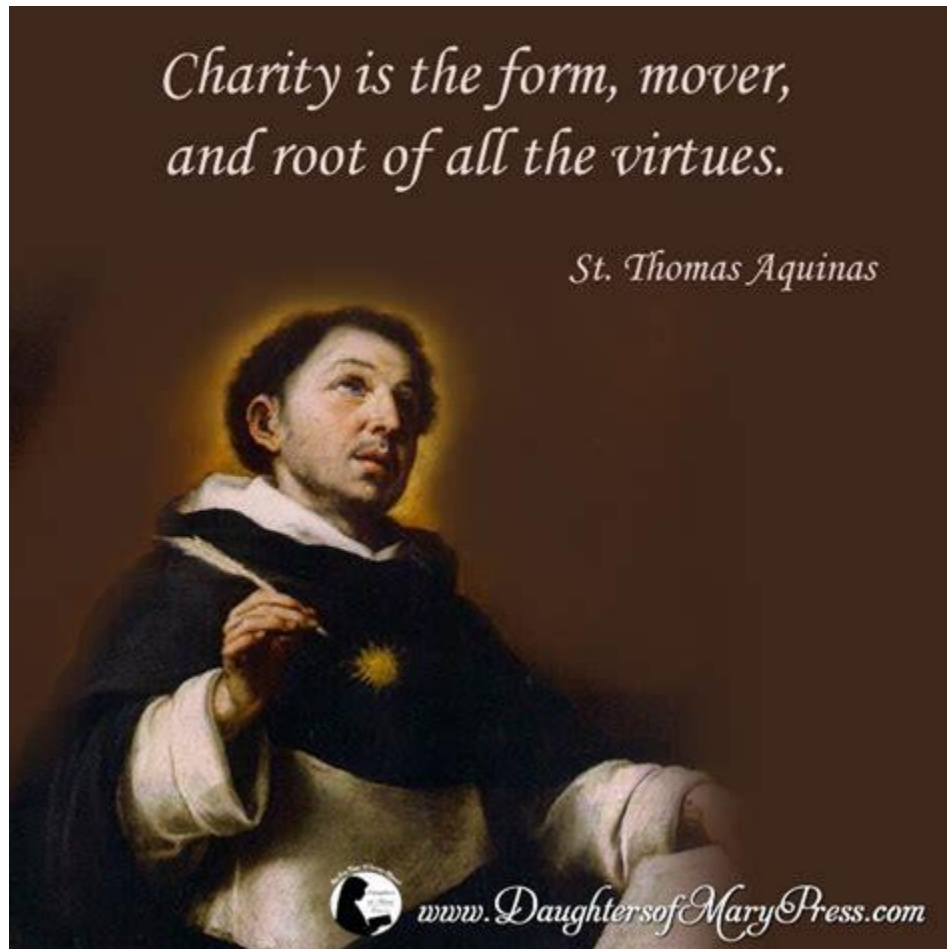


FROM FATHER JOHN: *“God’s will is to save us, and nothing pleases him more than our coming back to him with true repentance. The heralds of truth and the ministers of divine grace have told us this from the beginning, repeating it in every age. Indeed, God’s desire for our salvation is the primary and pre-eminent sign of his infinite goodness. ... He also taught us in many different ways that we should wish to imitate him by our own kindness and genuine love for one another.”* ~ Saint Maximus the Confessor, abbot

As a father has compassion on his sons, the Lord has pity on those who fear him!



Prayer, fasting and almsgiving (also known as charity) are all key components of our Lenten spiritual practices. Our goal during Lent should be to grow spiritually, to grow in our relationship with our Lord and

The Church gives us the season of Lent in order to give us a dedicated period of time each year where we intentionally re-dedicate ourselves to growing in faith and in Christian perfection. Pope Francis teaches us that *“Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. Let us not*

forget that real poverty hurts: no self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt."

Last week, I wrote about fasting, and in particular, our practice of giving up meat on Friday's as an exercise in self-denial. This week I want to share with you a homily by St. Leo the Great, pope, entitled *In praise of Charity*. In it, he discusses the importance of works of mercy, charity and almsgiving.

"In John's gospel the Lord says: By this love you have for one another, everyone will know you are my disciples. In a letter by John we read: My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love.

So the faithful should look into themselves and carefully examine their minds and the impulses of their hearts. If they find some of the fruits of love stored in their hearts then they must not doubt God's presence within them, but to make themselves more and more able to receive so great a guest they should do more and more works of durable mercy and kindness. After all, if God is love, charity should know no limit, for God himself cannot be confined within limits.

What is the appropriate time for performing works of charity? My beloved children, any time is the right time, but these days of Lent provide a special encouragement. Those who want to be present at the Lord's Passover in holiness of mind and body should seek above all to win this grace. Charity contains all other virtues and covers a multitude of sins.

As we prepare to celebrate that greatest of all mysteries, by which the blood of Jesus Christ destroyed our sins, let us first of all make ready the sacrificial offerings — that is, our works of mercy. What God in his goodness has already given to us, let us give to those who have sinned against us.

And to the poor also, and to those who are afflicted in various ways, let us show a more open-handed generosity so that God may be thanked through many voices and the needy may be fed as a result of our fasting. No act of devotion on the part of the faithful gives God more pleasure than the support that is lavished on his poor. Where God finds charity with its loving concern, there he recognizes the reflection of his own fatherly care.

Do not be put off giving by a lack of resources. A generous spirit is itself great wealth, and there can be no shortage of material for generosity where it is Christ who feeds and Christ who is fed. His hand is present in all this activity: his hand, which multiplies the bread by breaking it and increases it by giving it away.

When you give alms, do not be anxious but full of happiness. The greatest treasure will go to the one who has kept the least for himself. The holy apostle Paul tells us: *He who provides seed for the sower will give bread for food, provide you with more seed, and increase the harvest of your goodness,* in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen."

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.

