



Faith, hope, and charity are the three theological virtues that every Christian is called to live. However, among the three, charity holds the highest place. Saint Paul expresses this clearly in his First Letter to the Corinthians:

*“So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13)*

But why is it the most important? What makes it superior even to faith and hope? To understand its significance, we must delve into its meaning, theological foundation, and impact on the life of a Christian.

## 1. What Is Charity?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) defines charity in paragraphs 1822-1829 as **“the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”** (CCC 1822).

This definition contains two essential elements:

1. **Loving God above all things.** This is not just about acknowledging His existence but establishing a deep relationship with Him.
2. **Loving our neighbor.** Not just any kind of love, but a love that comes from God and sees the other as a brother or sister, regardless of their condition.

Charity is not just a feeling; it is an act of the will, enlightened by divine grace. It requires stepping outside of ourselves to seek the good of the other, even when it involves sacrifice.

## 2. Charity in the History of Salvation

From the Old Testament, God teaches His people to live charity through the Law and the Prophets. In Deuteronomy, we are commanded:

*“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5)*



This command is complemented by another:

“*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Leviticus 19:18)

In the New Testament, Jesus elevates these two commandments to the supreme law of Christian life. When a Pharisee asks Him which is the greatest commandment, He responds:

“*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:37-39)

Charity is the heart of the Gospel. It is the essence of Christ’s message and the criterion by which we will be judged, as taught in the Parable of the Final Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46: **“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...”**

### 3. Charity and the Other Theological Virtues

The theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) are deeply interconnected. Faith allows us to know God, hope sustains us on the journey toward Him, but only charity unites us to Him fully. Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that while faith and hope will cease in heaven (because there we will see God face to face and no longer need to hope), charity will remain forever.

As the *Catechism* states:

“*Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues.*” (CCC 1826)

Without charity, even faith is sterile, as Saint Paul affirms:



*“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.” (1 Corinthians 13:2)*

Charity gives life and meaning to all other virtues.

## **4. Practical Applications of Charity in Christian Life**

Charity is not an abstract idea; it is a concrete virtue that must be lived out daily. How can we practice it today?

### **a) In the Family**

The home is the first school of charity. Spouses are called to love each other with a sacrificial and generous love. Parents teach their children charity by encouraging them to share, forgive, and serve.

### **b) In Society**

We live in a world marked by indifference and selfishness. Practicing charity means caring for the poor, the sick, migrants, and those who suffer. Pope Francis calls us to avoid a “charity of words” and instead embrace concrete, active charity.

### **c) In the Church**

The Christian community is where charity should shine the brightest. The early Church lived charity radically:

*“No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.” (Acts 4:32)*

Today, we are called to continue this witness through fraternity, service, and mercy.



## 5. Charity in the Lives of the Saints

The saints are living models of charity. Some examples include:

- **Saint Vincent de Paul**, the patron of charitable works, dedicated his life to the poor.
- **Saint Teresa of Calcutta**, who brought charity to the most forgotten.
- **Saint Francis of Assisi**, who embraced lepers and renounced everything for the love of God.

All of them understood that to love is to give oneself, and that the greatest joy is in serving others.

## 6. Charity in Today's World

In a world marked by war, division, and indifference, charity is more urgent than ever. Today, we are called to:

1. **Be witnesses of God's love** in a world that has lost the sense of true love.
2. **Combat indifference** in the face of others' suffering.
3. **Live charity in small ways**, in daily life, with those around us.

Pope Benedict XVI said in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*:

*“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (Deus Caritas Est, 1)*

And that event is Christ, who taught us with His life, death, and resurrection that **“No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”** (John 15:13).

## Conclusion: Without Charity, We Are Nothing

Charity is the essence of Christianity. It is not optional but the defining mark of a disciple of Christ:



*“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)*

More than a virtue, charity is the very life of God within us. It is the only thing that remains eternally. At the end of our lives, we will be judged by love.

Therefore, let us live it with generosity, self-giving, and joy. As Saint Thérèse of Lisieux said:

**“In the heart of the Church, I will be love.”**