

# Quinquagesmia

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Date: 02 March 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Love suffers long and is kind. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. I think it's kind of funny how 1 Corinthians 13, St. Paul's famous love passage, is almost always, always read at weddings. Because what does St. Paul say that the first characteristic of love is? He says that the first characteristic of love is suffering. For love suffers long.

So I guess if anyone is looking to get married, or if anyone is looking to stay married, then you better be prepared to suffer. Because love suffers long. Nevertheless, 1 Corinthians 13 really isn't about weddings, or romance, or marriage. Yes, it is about love, but it is more about the kind of love that we should have toward God, as well as toward all people, including our very own enemies. For 1 Corinthians 13 is describing the kind of love that can only be attained by God's grace. The only kind of love that is truly worthy to be called Christian love.

For ultimately, 1 Corinthians 13 is describing the kind of love God expects from each and every one of us, whether we are married or not. And maybe that is why the first characteristic of this kind of love is suffering. For love suffers long. Because the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 does not come easy.

It is difficult, challenging, and hard. For ultimately, the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 is the kind of love that is an exercise of our faith. Which is perhaps why this definition of love is read on Quinquagesima Sunday, on the last Sunday before the start of Lent.

Because love must be the motivation behind every fast, the motivation behind every offering, and the motivation behind every act of devotion and prayer. For Lent is the season of love, a season that is dedicated to self-denial sacrifice and prayer. A season where we are all encouraged to think less and less about ourselves and more and more about God as well as our neighbor.

[ 2 : 54 ] And yet, I can't tell you how many Lenten sermons I've heard that have all focused upon the personal benefits of fasting, or the individual rewards of tithing and giving alms, or how prayer and focusing upon our Lord's Passion and Cross can lead to some great gain.

But do we always need to personally gain something in order to do it? Do we always need to understand or to have a good reason to be generous or faithful or kind?

Or can we just do these things simply because that is what love demands? For if love suffers long, then I think the best thing I can say about Lent is that it teaches us not only how to suffer, but how to suffer well.

By showing us how to live in the sacrificial love of Christ. For Lent really can teach us how to love without there always needing to be a reason why.

And how to give without us always needing to gain something in return. Yes, not buying a \$3 cup of coffee on Monday so that we can put a bit more in the offering plate on Sunday might sound frivolous, if not a bit annoying.

[ 4 : 32 ] Just as giving up a cheeseburger in order to eat a fish flay sandwich on Friday might seem totally arbitrary. It certainly isn't what I would choose to do.

Nevertheless, all those small sacrifices, those tiny annoyances that are often not of our own choosing, that little bit of suffering that we endure solely out of our love and devotion to another. Well, that is the way of love. For love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

For love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. And love never fails.

Precisely because love is not looking for some great reward or benefit or personal gain. The act of love is its own success.

[ 5 : 54 ] Because regardless of the outcome, the act of love is always, always a great victory against the devil, the world, and our own selfishness and sinful pride.

For love suffers long. And still, love never fails. Because the love of God is worth every sacrifice it asks of us.

And that is why we always hear 1 Corinthians 13, read in church right before the beginning of Lent. Because love must be the motivation behind every fast, behind every offering, and behind every act of corporate worship, personal devotion, and prayer.

And that is how I will choose to end this morning's meditation. Without any explanation for why we should fast. Without any reason for why we should be generous.

Without any promise of personal gain, or glory, or individual reward. Just love. For in the end, love is what motivated our Lord to live the life he lived, and to die the death he died.

[ 7 : 18 ] And by God's grace, may that same love be our motivation to observe this upcoming season of self-denial and prayer as well.

For love suffers long. And yet, even in the midst of our Lord's suffering and death on the cross, love never fails.

And Lent is the season of that very same love. So let us deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ our Lord.

For love suffers long, and is kind. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen.