

SERMON – THE 14TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY – 25 SEPTEMBER 2011
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command.

Faith, hope and charity....

One commentary links these three to the divisions of time, past, present and future. Faith looks back on the mighty acts of God, back on the birth, life and death of Jesus, back to the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

That faith is our anchor to look ahead to the future with hope, hope in eternal life with God.

Charity is the extension of God's love to us which is grounded in faith and hope in this present life.

Faith, hope and charity.....

The author of Hebrews wrote **Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV)** *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

He goes on to recount how through the ages certain men had faith in God's overall plan although they did not see the fruition of that plan. Abraham left his family and struck out into the desert because God told him to. He later was told that he would be the father of many although he had no children in his old age. Others were given promises for the future and they all had hope.

Today we can look back and see more clearly as the old saying goes, "Hindsight is twenty-twenty."

Based on the past as revealed in Holy Scripture we can have hope also; hope in the future with God. Although we too cannot see the future clearly, maybe not as clearly as we would like, but

we do have that blessed hope, that assurance that God is in control and that He has a plan for each one of us.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that charity, that love is over all else. **1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (KJV)** *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

And he also tells us that love will outlast all else, **1 Corinthians 13:8 (KJV)** *Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

Then he wraps it up with this **1 Corinthians 13:13 (KJV)** *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

Why is this so? Simply putting it, it is because God himself is pure love. It is because God himself is pure love and we are created, we are put here on this earth to love God. That is our sole purpose in life.

We are commanded, not suggested, to love God with our entire being; with our hearts, with our souls and with our minds and with our strength. Then we are commanded to take the love that God has for us and to love each other, to love each other exactly the same way Jesus loves us.

John 3:16 (KJV) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Each time we come together as the ecclesia, the gathering, the Church we become one as the Body of Christ; we come face to face with the precious Body and Blood of our Lord. We come together to be fed so we can go into the world as the Latin expresses it *ite missa est*, which can be translated as “Go. You are sent forth,” to spread the love of God.

That is why we are fed; to strengthen us for our task of loving others as God has loved us. That is why Mass is central to all of the Creedal churches such as Anglicans, Roman and Orthodox Christians. We do not center just on the music or the preaching but on the Canon of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer. We do not focus on who the celebrant or the preacher of the pastor might be. We center on the prayer itself.

It is in this act that we recall, to invite Christ to us, to be with us along with all the saints that ever were and all the saints that will ever be, with all the host of heaven, angels and archangels in this moment of time which becomes the eternal NOW of God as Jesus joins us in the True Presence at the Altar.

We do not know how this is done. It is a mystery. We do not subscribe to the theory of Transubstantiation as the Romans do, or to the Consubstantiation as do the Lutherans, but approach it more as the Orthodox that it is a mystery. It just happens. There are just some things that cannot be explained.

It is love that is expressed. It is simply love in a mystery.

Amen.