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## **Truth, Goodness and Beauty: Love of Others as God Made Them**

### **Charity: Divine Love in Us**

In order for anyone to love rightly, we need to first know and love the truth, goodness and beauty of the human person as created by God. In the book of Genesis we read about how God, out of His infinite and creative love, created everything that exists. At the end of each day, He said, **“It is good.”** After He created man and woman, however, He said, **“It is very good.”** (cf. Gen. 1:31)

Why “very good”? Because unlike every other creature on earth, you and I have all been created by God in His image and likeness because of his love for us. The goal of our lives should be to receive God’s love, relish that love with Him and share that love with others. In us, the type of God’s love I am referring to is often called charity. A good definition of charity is the love by which we love God above all things for His own sake and by which we love others for God’s sake, which is simply a sharing in the love God first gave us (cf. Fr. John Hardon, “Modern Catholic Dictionary”). Such love always and only seeks the good of the other.

In God, this divine love, which is shared between the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit is so true, good and beautiful that by its nature it wants to share itself with everyone: you, me, the angels and saints. Wow! How blessed we are to be created by the Father in love, redeemed from our sins by Jesus offering His life to pay for the cost of our sins, and the Holy Spirit to animate us, that is, to bring new spiritual life to us each day when we receive the love of God and grow in our communion of love. Oh, what a gift it is to know, receive and share the truth, goodness and beauty of this love with God and others.

Here is how it works. When we open our hearts to the spiritual gift of God’s love, that love flourishes within and through us and allows us to love with the most perfect type of love: charity. When we do this, we become fulfilled and happy and attain our potential as humans in divine love (charity) with God, others and ourselves. Such love is the only thing that will satisfy the deepest desires of humans because God loves us so much He created us to be fulfilled only by His infinite, divine love.

### **Overemphasizing Our Differences**

Unfortunately, when we encounter others who are different from us in some way, it can be difficult for us to love them in our fallen, human way of thinking. Even though every human being shares in the same God-given dignity, in our brokenness we tend to focus on what is different in them rather than seeing their dignity as human beings, as God created them and knows and loves them. Such flawed ways of thinking have been common since the first sin when Adam and Eve rejected the truth of God’s love. Tempted by the devil, they selfishly tried to determine for themselves what is true, good and beautiful. Such broken thinking and acting throughout the history of humanity has piled sin upon sin upon God and others rather than charity upon charity for God and others.

One such sin upon sin happens when we don’t honor, respect and have that divine love for those who are different from us whether by the color of their skin or the country from which they come. Sin upon sin can also occur when we have experienced an injustice and then cause harm to others, some of whom may not at all have offended us.

What the world is so in need of is a confronting of the injustices of the past or present in truth and goodness so the beauty of healing of injustices can occur and sin upon sin can be transformed with God's help to charity upon charity so there is true, good and beautiful justice and peace which reflects what we all owe to each other.

Sadly in our own country some human beings, even our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, have not always been treated with the dignity, respect and charity we owe them. In our own state of South Dakota, we can think of how Native Americans at times have been or are unfairly and sinfully treated. We can think of the injustice of the past of slavery of African Americans and other injustices just to name a few. Unfortunately, in the past year revenge in response to real or perceived racism has resulted in injustice to others, like business owners whose property was damaged or destroyed. The solution to resolving racism is charity, not discrimination or revenge because of racism.

The Church has always condemned racism—discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of one's race (Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," art. 29)—as a serious sin against charity, and I join in that condemnation. As a Catholic bishop, on behalf of the Church, I offer an apology for any hardship any and all have experienced in the past or in the present related to injustices of any sort. Even though none of us can take on the responsibility of any unjust action of others, I believe fitting apologies on behalf of the Church are important so all of us as Catholics and all others of goodwill can be part of the healing remedies of past offenses of others or ourselves.

### **Time to Look Within Ourselves to Discern the Degree of Charity in our Hearts**

I recall when I was in fourth or fifth grade when a new student from Vietnam joined our all-Caucasian class in school. He was different and I didn't at first know how to relate to and love him as God does. I noticed he was often alone at recess, so I started to hang out with him and before long the knowledge and love of God grew in my mind and heart as I was trying to overcome the obstacles in my mind that he is not like the rest of us. Thanks be to God he wasn't like the rest of us, or at least me, who needed to come to know, love and serve a brother or sister who is different than me.

As I would grow in age, experience and God's grace and wisdom, I would begin to love to learn about people from other nations and ethnicities, and God would begin to fill my mind and heart with more and more divine knowledge and love for them. In my years as a priest and now bishop, I have been blessed to work with parishioners, deacons and priests from various nations and ethnicities. These blessed encounters have enabled me to grow in the knowledge and love of God and others as God made them. Thanks be to God for the necessary conversion that has occurred in me to learn the truth, goodness and beauty of every person the way God made each of us.

Our faith calls us to love with that divine love every man, woman and child. No one is outside the reach of God's love, and as *Lifelong Catholic Missionary Disciples Through God's Love* it is my hope and prayer all people will be known and loved as God created each of us.

### **Finding Strength in the Sacraments and the Saints**

Loving others who are different from us can be difficult. Again, this is part of our fallen humanity: we tend to see those differences before we see our common humanity. Left to our own strength, we may often fail to have this charity towards others. Fortunately, as Catholics we are blessed to come to know the truth, goodness and beauty of God's love in a particularly powerful way by receiving the sacraments. In the sacraments we receive grace (God's very own life, love and power) which helps us to know, love and serve God and others in charity and to love ourselves as God loves us. When we do so, we seek the good of others rather than slipping into selfish ways of thinking and acting.

It is in the saints that we see this charity—given above all through the sacraments—lived out, including towards people of other ethnicities, nationalities and beliefs. One example is a saint for whom one of our parishes is named: St. Katharine Drexel. Born into a wealthy Philadelphia family, Katharine had a deep concern for both Native Americans and African Americans and would ultimately enter religious life and spend much of her inheritance serving them.

When she was canonized by St. John Paul II in 2000, the Vatican described her four-fold legacy this way: “her love for the Eucharist, her spirit of prayer, and her Eucharistic perspective on the unity of all peoples; her undaunted spirit of courageous initiative in addressing social iniquities among minorities—one hundred years before such concern aroused public interest in the United States; her belief in the importance of quality education for all, and her efforts to achieve it; her total giving of self, of her inheritance and all material goods in selfless service of the victims of injustice.”

May you and I follow the example set by St. Katharine Drexel and countless others, seek the strength of the Lord in the sacraments, and discover ever more the truth, goodness and beauty of every person regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or beliefs, just as He does. Let’s also pray for repentance, forgiveness, healing of injustices, and God’s charity to reign in all humanity.

### **Additional Resources**

Catechism of the Catholic Church: [On the Human Person: 355-384](#); [Equality and Differences among Human Beings: 1934-1938](#)

St. John Paul II: [Address on Racism](#)

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: [The Church and Racism](#)

U.S. Bishops Pastoral Letter Against Racism: [“Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love”](#)

Vatican News summary of the [Life and Work of St. Katharine Drexel](#)