**Luke 18:18-27 and Colossians 3:12-16**

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Last week’s gospel signaled the beginning of Christ’s ministry on earth. We heard at the end of the gospel that key phrase “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. This phrase is the reason why our Lord assumed flesh and allowed himself to be baptized. His appearance on earth was the last resort to change our ways. Up until this time there were 4 major prophets and 12 minor prophets. All of these men attempted to bring Israel back from their errors that they made and finally become the true chosen people. The people changed their ways for a time, but they eventually returned to their wicked ways. John the Baptist, the greatest and the last of all the Old Testament prophets, prepared the way for Christ’s ministry.

Today’s gospel about the rich young ruler and the epistle reading to the Colossians outline what we must do to be with the Lord. Christ deals with the outward basics—first obeying God by observing the commandments he gave to us and second extending our love to our fellow man. These commandments are outward actions that we must obey. You don’t have any Gods or idols to worship, You don’t go out and kill people, you don’t steal money from the bank, you don’t bear false witness against anyone, you don’t commit adultery, you keep the Sabbath holy, you don’t covet and you take care of your fellow man by selling your extra goods and giving to those who need it. These are straightforward requests. They don’t require any further thinking about what the Lord wants.

St. Paul complements our Lord’s commandments with a set of virtues. “A virtue is a trait or quality that is deemed to be morally good and thus is valued as a foundation of principle. In other words, it is a behavior that shows high moral standards: doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.” We could say that the 10 commandments are external actions we must be obedient to and keep us in the good graces with the church, but the virtues of St. Paul are internal behaviors that bring us closer and closer to the Lord.

So how can we further explain these five virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience that St. Paul speaks of in his epistle. Compassion is defined as a sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. Are we tuned in to those around us who have problems and do we have the capacity to feel sympathy for them. How many of us have shed tears for someone who has suffered greatly?

If we have compassion then kindness should kick in. Kindness is the act of trying to help others in their difficult situations. Ask yourself the question, do we offer ourselves as a helpmate to those who have difficulties or do we ignore them? Will we help someone if it only takes a minute of our time, but if it is longer we bypass them?

The third virtue is humility. Humility is recognizing how sinful we are and as a result we empty ourselves of the burdens and surrender ourselves to Christ. However, most of us do not look inward at our own misgivings but we look outward and judge others. This is probably the most common and daily sin we do-- yet if we were truly humble we would not engage in it at all. Judging or pointing out someone else’s foibles makes us feel good inside because we are able to put someone down who we think is beneath us. Remember do not point out the speck in someone else’s eye when you have a log in your own eye. How do you think God will judge us when he points it out to us on judgment day?

St. Paul speaks of gentleness. We can define gentleness as a quality of being tender, or mild-mannered. It is a disposition that we should carry because it invites others to be in our sphere. If we are bitter it alienates people and drives them away. Remember that we should be gentle and respect all peoples, whether we agree with them or not, they are still inhabitants of the one body of Christ.

The fifth virtue is patience. The old adage is Rome wasn’t built in a day. St. Paul realized that accepting Christ among the nations would be an arduous task. It wasn’t going to be easy to convince the people that Christ is for all and that the church would be built overnight. In like manner, we need to approach the building of our own church here in Cohoes as a slow task.

Finally St. Paul speaks about love as the cement that brings all these virtues together. In the Greek St. Paul uses the word “agape”. Agape is unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God". If we have this love, all of these virtues will never fade away.

These readings today bring a foretaste of what we will be in the coming weeks as we begin to leave the season of Christmas and usher in the pre-Lenten and Lenten season. Let these themes be ever present on our minds so that our repentance will be genuine. Amen.