

CHARITY

Reprinted 13th October, 2005. Originally form Canmas chat room

"But the third, and last being Charity, comprehends the whole . . ."

Have you been charitable lately? I don't mean by that, have you given any money to the needy, or bought a raffle ticket, or contribution to a worthy cause. That is the easiest, and often times most insincere form of charity that can exist. This is not to say that such isn't needed or helpful to someone else. But this form of Charity is seldom personal or with any real depth of meaning to the donor or the recipient.

The charity which comprehends the whole is the charity of love, which itself is an extremely complex word, with a myriad of meanings. Masonic love, or Masonic Charity (to my way of thinking, interchangeable terms) is that essence of spirit within us which makes us yearn to give relief to the suffering of others; to provide comfort and support to those experiencing personal crises in their lives; to be understanding rather than condemning another's shortcomings; to attempt to bring out in another person his strengths and his best qualities.

Looking back over the years of my life, the things which have brought me the most happiness and fulfillment have been precisely those where I have been able to have been of some help and support to somebody else; conversely, my greatest sense of failure and disappointment are those instances where I have felt I have not done all I could to make another's road a little easier, or perhaps I have turned my back rather than faced an awkward or difficult situation.

Being charitable in the Masonic sense is often times one of the most difficult and personally challenging experiences we can face. It can mean having to swallow one's pride, admit ones' own deficiencies or deny oneself some transitory pleasure, which may seem important or desirable at the time.

But it is precisely that element of personal sacrifice which gives the act its depth, its meaning and its value to not only the recipient, but to the donor.

St. Francis of Assisi wrote this prayer, which in many ways sums up the concept of Masonic charity:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt,
faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and in dying that we are born to eternal life."

Author Unknown: Editorial in THE TRACING BOARD; GRS; November, 1982.