



What is the Forgotten Virtue?

By the late Father Kilian McGowan, C.P.

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The poet Wordsworth once wrote that the “best portion of a good man’s life” is “his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.” In his famous Cantic of Charity (Corinthians, Chapter 13) Saint Paul named it as one of the foremost daughters of charity: “Charity...is kind,” he wrote.

Kindness is like a beautiful jewel carefully and beautifully wrapped. For to the gem of charity it adds a most attractive packaging of gentleness and considerateness. Kindness is, therefore, an overflow of a thoughtful and selfless love into a realm of speech and action. It is indeed a God-like quality.

Volumes could be written on the exquisite kindness that our Blessed Lord showed toward everyone. While He always placed the primary accent on the spiritual, He never overlooked the physical and emotional needs of others. Remember the time He resurrected the sick child from the dead. Immediately, He insisted that she be given something to eat. He was casual about the tremendous miracle, and concerned about the youngster’s hunger.

You’ll never have to look far for opportunities to practice the Godlike quality of kindness. Think of all the people you know in spiritual, physical, or emotional need. Just look about you and note all the forgotten, neglected, and lonely people that are starving for little acts of kindness. And when you start looking, always start in your own home.

Impulsive little acts of kindness can be very touching...and effective, too. But true kindness is not simply the overflow of the feeling of well-being or a sudden burst of good humor. It is a stable disposition of one’s heart that should be carefully cultivated and constantly practiced. There is always a predictable consistency to a truly kind person.

To cultivate this Godlike virtue, start being kind in thought. Think out ways of being kind to others...in the home and away from it. Keynote in your thinking the good qualities of others, rather than their more obvious failings. This will make it easier for you to think kindly of others, and will even increase your peace of soul.

Make your acts of kindness personal. As kindness always implies a certain giving of one’s self, don’t be afraid to be yourself. Don’t worry about being awkward,

misunderstood, or unappreciated in your efforts at kindness. Kindness is so universally appreciated that it will never be wasted.

Kindness has a certain timeliness to it. It's at its beautiful best when it caters to an urgent need of the moment. It's simple too, just as ordinary as sunshine, and just as necessary. A thoughtful letter...a brief visit...a word of encouragement or congratulations...a small or thoughtful gift...or just one's silent presence can bring instant joy to the recipient.

The tongue is one of the greatest instruments of kindness. The tongue gives birth to the kindness one has conceived in his heart. An unkind thought can be concealed...an unkind impulse can be smothered...but once an unkind word has been spoken, the damage is done. If you are perfectly kind in your speech, you are possessed of an exquisite kindness.

Only kindness that flows from intimate friendship with Our Lord can conquer selfishness. Close personal contact with Christ has such a transforming effect. To plunge often into this infinite ocean of kindness, gradually washes away our innate egotism and unkindness.

What was more reassuring attractive in our Lord than His kindness? Saint Paul wrote "In Him the goodness and kindness of God our Savior, appeared." (Titus 3:4) This dominant quality of the Heart of the Savior proved irresistible even to the most hardened of sinners.

From the Heart of the Savior, kindness will increasingly pour itself into the lives of those who maintain a daily contact with Him. This outpouring brings benevolence and forbearance, compassion and consideration, sensitiveness to others needs, and a merciful overlooking of their failures.

No good, it is true, can be accomplished in the home or out of it, without sincere love. We resist any kind of force, but we surrender to kindness. This attractive virtue never humiliates, and always comforts. It shows its face in an habitual, sensitive, unself-centered concern for all others and their needs.

Yes, kindness is one of the greatest gifts you can give the world. It sweetens sorrow and lessens pain. It inspires hope in faint hearts and discovers beauties in every human person. It lightens burdens and gives uplift to the unfortunate. It lessens the bitterness of failure and it enkindles love and gratitude. It is so Christlike. Why not be an Apostle of kindness?

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