

9/5/24

Speech to Upper School on *Omnia in Caritate*

For those who don't know me yet, my name is Mr. Gross, and I am the Latin teacher here at Tatnall. While that is a fairly accurate description of what I do on a day-to-day basis and I do tend to describe my job as such when people ask, there is a more accurate way to describe what I do. I am by training a philologist. Besides being a fun word to say, philology is literally a love for words but has come to be the study of language and literature. As a classical philologist, that means that I attempt to understand the history and culture of the people living around the ancient Mediterranean primarily through their oral and written historical record.

So what does this matter to all of you, and why am I talking to you this morning? I want to take the time to examine our motto, *omnia in caritate*, because its meaning is much deeper and richer than most of us are aware. So prepare yourselves as we undertake a journey through some hardcore philology to gain a better understanding of the philosophy behind our motto.

In order to understand what our motto *means*, we must first know what it *says*. I'm willing to bet that many, if not most, of you can shout out what *omnia in caritate* says in English. Yes, all things in love or all things done in love. Now the first two words, *omnia* and *in*, are fairly straightforward. But the soul of our motto lies in that final word, *caritate*, which we translate as love, and deserves our attention as its meaning is rich and complex.

Our motto first grabbed my attention when I started as a faculty member here in the fall of 2019. The use of *caritate* piqued my curiosity because, as our Latin students know, the standard word for love in Latin is not *caritate*, but *amor*. Unfortunately, the demands of starting a new job did not allow me the time to pursue this. But then in the spring of 2020, like the rest of the world, I suddenly found myself with more free time than I knew what to do with and so I returned to this question that had been in the back of my mind for months - why *caritate*?

Well, here is what I found. *Caritate* is definitely not the standard word for love in Latin literature. In all of the Latin literature that survives from the classical world, *amor* and the closely related verb *amo* are the 298th and 304th most frequently used words respectively. *Caritas* (the nominative or subject form of *caritate*) is the 1,456th most frequently used word. The adjective *carus* which is etymologically related to *caritas* clocks in at 930. As you can see the total uses of *caritas* and *carus* combined barely reach half the uses of *amor* alone.

So why *caritate*? Surely if Mrs. Tatnall was going to reach way down past *amor* to use *caritate* in our motto, there must have been a reason.

So, what is love? What is *caritate*? As I mentioned before *caritate* is a form of the noun *caritas*, *caritatis*, a feminine noun. The Prop. at the beginning of the definition mean “properly” and indicates that this is the original meaning of the word. When I first looked this up and found “costliness” and “high price” as the first definitions of *caritas*, I must admit I was a bit perplexed. Where is the love? - Okay that is the only reference to the Black Eyed Peas; I promise and I apologize.

Well, let’s look at some examples from Latin literature and see what’s going on. Leading off we have Cato the Elder. This friendly looking man uses *caritas* in his *De Agri Cultura*, a treatise on farming written in about 160 BCE and the oldest surviving work of Latin prose. Here Cato encourages farmers to have good storerooms so that they can hold their crops until prices are high.

Varro, almost a century and a half later, in his treatise on agriculture, the *De Re Rustica*, gives the same advice. He suggests that farmers sell immediately those crops that won’t keep, but to hold on to those that store well until prices are high.

When other Romans discuss *caritas* in this sense they are often complaining about the high prices of important commodities: provisions for the army, grain for their citizens, olive oil, wine, and even money itself. Through an examination of the specific points of complaint, it becomes clear that *caritas* is used to describe the high prices of necessities - in particular food. These Romans are complaining about inflation.

If you've tuned into the news at all in the past few years, undoubtedly you have heard about inflation. When we talk about inflation today, and when we really care about it, we talk about the rising prices of groceries and gas - things we can't live without.

Alright, thus far we have defined *caritas* as the costliness and high price of necessities, things vital to our livelihoods. I bet that, when you heard I would be talking about our motto, you didn't expect so much discussion of the Roman agrarian economy. So what was Mrs. Tatnall thinking? Does our motto actually mean "all things in service of inflation"? How does *caritas* have anything to do with love? Put it another way, to quote the Queen of Rock 'n' Roll herself, Tina Turner, what's love got to do with it?

This is where we need to turn not to the proper definition, but the tropical one. The Trop. at the start of the second definition stands for tropical and indicates metaphorical and figurative meanings. Here at last is where we find affection, esteem, regard, and the love we have been searching for. Let's take a look at what this type of love meant to the Romans and how it differs from *amor*.

The first century BCE orator and philosopher Cicero discuss just this difference. While we show both *amor* and *caritas* towards the people closest to us, we can display only *caritas* to others - our elders, people we respect, and even our country.

A little over a century later, the rhetorician and educator Quintilian provides us with an even better understanding of the difference between *caritas* and *amor*. During his discussion of the rhetorical value of pathos (emotion) and ethos (character), Quintilian informs us that *amor* is a temporary feeling while *caritas* is a lasting part of our character.

Amor, we should observe, can be felt by anyone - even brutes, knaves, scoundrels, ruffians, and whatever other terms you may have in mind for people of low moral character. *Charitas*, on the other hand, is the preserve of those who display benevolence, goodwill, and affection.

Other Romans speak of the *caritas* that they and others feel towards their extended families and friends, their children, one's country, the Roman Republic, citizens, and even human beings in general.

Now, it is important to note that this metaphorical meaning of love originates from the first, proper one of costliness. So how do we square this?

Because *caritas* originates as a high price for something vital, something dear, when it acquires the meaning of esteem, it must mean acts of love and affection that cost us something, that cost us something dearly. With this in mind, our first thought is likely giving money to charity. *Caritas* is after all the root of our word charity. But I would like us to think more deeply about what else it might cost us to display *caritas*.

There is one commodity, one resource more precious to all of us than money, and that is time. It is the only thing we can't earn more of, so when we spend it on others, it is the greatest expression of love we can show.

So what might it look like to act with *caritas* at the expense of our time? It's helping your sibling with their homework when you could be playing video games instead. It's helping with the dishes at home when you could be watching netflix. It's shoveling your neighbor's sidewalk and driveway because they are out of town or elderly or just because. It's including the new student at the potential cost of popularity.

In essence, *caritas* is the embodiment of citizenship at the macro level and neighborliness at the micro.

I have seen incredible acts of *caritas* on our campus: Spencer Neidig giving more of himself than most of us can fathom by attending the Air Force Academy; Hadley Hinmon far surpassing our service hour requirement by volunteering for 500 hours; Omar Belkadi joining the swim team last year so that we could have relays - so that others could achieve their goals. The leaders of our affinity groups and our peer leaders give their time in service of inclusivity. Mr. Hertzler, Ms. Pyle, and so many other faculty dedicate their flex and prep period to providing

extra help. Ms. Morgan and Ms. Morris give untold hours beyond the school day to help our seniors through the college application process.

The inclusion of *caritas* in our motto is, in my opinion, a truly inspired choice. It calls us to engage in a higher love. The type of love that is not a fleeting feeling, but rather one that we embed into our character. And since character is molded by our actions, I want to encourage all of us (myself included) throughout this school year to think about what it means to act *omnia in caritate* and then go out and do it.

Thank you.