

# THE MARVELS OF DIVINE GRACE

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## Introduction

THERE are many people around us who may ask us, or at least ask themselves, the use of becoming Catholic. I have tried to answer that question in many ways. But there is one reason which it seems to me would appeal most forcibly to these inquiries, and that is an explanation of the doctrine of sanctifying grace. Ours they say, is a matter-of-fact age, in which we no more live on nebulous ideals, however noble they may be. We look for tangible gains and quick returns. To satisfy even so hard and exacting a generation, a clear exposition of the beauty and excellence of divine Grace should be enough. If the teeming millions of our fellow men only knew the marvels which Christ wishes to effect in them by an infusion of a new life, many more would now be within the Christian fold. In this pamphlet at least one aspect of the beauty of Christianity is given which should attract every seeker after truth. I shall try to explain, as lucidly as possible, what Grace is, what it does for us and what are its wonderful properties. A true appreciation of Grace will bring non-Christians to a better knowledge and love of God and of His Commandments. Christians, too, will advance in fervour the more they realize what a treasure they possess by having Grace in their hearts.

This essay could be given various titles: Why be a Christian?—The Wonders and Glories of Grace—The Heart and Soul of Christianity—The Gift Above All Gifts—God's Best Gift to Man and Pearls of Great Price, etc. The title chosen is inadequate, but so are the others also because the subject itself is so sublime as to challenge human speech.

All we shall attempt here is to speak of the essence of Grace (or its formal effects, as schoolmen say), namely, of Grace as the principle of a share in the divine adoption, of justification and sanctification on earth and of glory in heaven.

Then come the necessary consequences: the indwelling of the Holy Ghost and the infusion of virtues with other gifts and actual graces.

And there are other fruits of grace that depend on our co-operation: a special efficacy of our prayers, and the power to make satisfaction for sins and acquire merits by your good works—all that forms part of the vital power of Christianity.

## 1. WHAT IS GRACE?

Let me begin by telling you what Grace is not, in order to realise more clearly what it is. Grace is not merely the absence of vice or sin in the soul. The human soul, as we know, is by nature exquisitely beautiful. It is immortal, spiritual, endowed with intellect and will and made to the very image and likeness of God. The beauty of the human soul is far superior to that of the material world. The soul is imperishable, whereas matter is perishable. St. Thomas called matter the mere "tail-end" of God's creation. The spiritual and supernatural orders rank far above our tangible, visible world. If men are so much in love with this perishable world, this "tail end" of God's handiwork, what would they not do if they only realised the priceless worth of the head and crown of God's wonderful creation, viz., the spiritual and supernatural orders?

Grace a New Life.—Holy Writ abounds in texts to prove the fact of the inner change that comes over us when grace enters the soul. In many places it refers to this change as a new supernatural life, a regeneration, a renovation and a revitalisation. It speaks of man being "born again," of a "new man," a "new creature." Our Lord Himself told Nicodemus: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (St. John 3, 5). Nicodemus took these words literally and wrongly and said in all simplicity: "How can a man enter into his mother's womb and be born again?" Evidently Our Lord meant a new kind of rebirth, a new and higher life in the spiritual order of souls.

To explain the nature of this "New Life" which sanctifying grace bestows on the soul, the Fathers of the Church employed some helpful comparisons.

They compared the baptismal waters to the waters out of which God created living beings. Just as God brought forth living fishes out of the waters, so does the baptismal font give the supernatural life to man and make of him a

"new creature." They compared the baptismal waters also to the mother's womb, which fashions and forms and brings into the world a new creature.

As a Red Hot Iron.—St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of grace as a divine light shining in the soul. But his most forcible comparison is that of a bar of cold iron, thrust into the fire. After a time it loses its blackness, coldness and rigidity, becomes red-hot, flexible and malleable, and seems to be fire itself; so, too, a soul in the state of grace shares the nature of God. More recent writers use the comparison of the foot-print, the portrait and the mirror. The material world around us—the stars, the moon, the earth, the sun—show forth the majesty of God just as a foot-print tells us that a person has passed that way, and in the spiritual order of things, the angels and man's soul made to the image and likeness of God speak to us of God's spirituality, as a portrait shows us the one portrayed. Although in different orders of being, God is spirit and man is spirit; God is intelligence and will and so is man. In the case of the mirror a still more vivid representation is obtained. A man looking in a mirror sees himself in all his colour and life-like reality.

Though it be only a reflection of him, nevertheless, the mirror gives him a more real representation of himself than a portrait. So a soul in the state of grace is a truer image of God than a soul in its mere natural state.

Other writers again tell us that what brilliance is to a diamond sparkling in sunlight, that and much more is Grace in our soul. Enter a dark room and the electric lamp, dead and dull before the switch is turned on, suddenly is transfigured when the current flows in. So our soul, when connected up with God, the source of all Grace. Moreover, souls may have greater or less intensity of grace-brightness, like electrical lamps of different strength. A soul shining with Grace is a most beautiful sight. St. Catherine of Siena saw in vision a soul in that state and could hardly look on its dazzling brightness. "If I did not know there was only one God, I should think this was a "god."

A Share in God's Life.—Perhaps the simplest way to understand this commingling of the divine with the human by Grace is to consider it, in the words of St. Peter, as a share in the divine Life of God. Later writers spoke of the union of our nature with the divine as the commingling of water and wine. Every day the priest prays at Mass: "O God, Who in creating human nature, didst marvellously ennoble it, and hast still more marvellously renewed it, grant that by the mystery of this water and wine we may be made partakers of His Godhead, Who vouchsafed to become partaker of our humanity, Jesus Christ, Thy Son.

We are all familiar with the different grades of life. Lowest in the scale comes inanimate creation. Stones and minerals have only being and existence, but no motion and life. Higher comes the vegetable kingdom. Plants grow and have the power of changing minerals, mud and water into proteins. They have the lowest form of life. Higher comes the animal world which, in addition to being and growth has sensation and movement. Far higher comes the rational life of man. Man is matter but also spirit. Like the animals he has bones and nerves and muscles, but like the angels also he has intellect and will. Once an animal dies, it goes out of existence, but the soul of a man is immortal. It can never die. Hence man's absolute superiority over the material world. A still higher form of life is that of angels, who are pure spirits, without bodies and not dependent on matter.

God's Life.—But infinitely superior to all these grades of life is the untreated life of God. He was from the beginning, He is, and He always will be. He is dependent on no one for His existence, but is the source and beginning of all things visible and invisible. From Him all creation takes its rise, as rays descend from the sun. But He is "pure being" with no admixture at all of "non-being." All creation is a mere imitation of His existence. He is the substance, we are but the shadow. He is the voice, we the echo. Now to share this wonderful life of God is the grandest thing we can conceive, because it is the communication of the creator Himself as far as He can give Himself to His creature. This is a mystery indeed. But wherever the Infinite meets the finite, the problem goes beyond the grasp of the human intellect. We know for a fact that the human is joined to the Divine by Grace, but how it is done we shall know only in the next life. Meanwhile we must believe that the fact does take place—a fact that causes the sharpest difference between men. To outward seeming, the baptized and the unbaptized are much the same. Yet they differ as night and day. The soul of the baptized has been so transformed into the divine likeness that the very angels admire its perfections.

It is the new life, the precious life of Grace, that makes all the difference. The soul is enriched with a beauty which no created splendour, no perfection in the natural order, can ever bestow. Not only is there the blessedness of innocence, the absence of all sin, but the re-born soul is adorned with powers and virtues that make God Himself contemplate it with the love with which He looks on His only begotten Son. The Holy Spirit dwells, rejoicing, in that

soul as in a consecrated sanctuary. Should the baptized infant die, its immortal spirit would wing its way straight into the bosom of the Father.

The Nature of Grace.—"All comparisons," you will say, "are lame." What, then, is in itself that wonderful and sublime thing which you call divine grace?"

I answer first that, according to the Catholic doctrine, we can do no good work of ourselves towards our salvation in the next life. We need the help or grace of God. For our supernatural end we need supernatural means. Now Grace is a supernatural gift bestowed by God on rational creatures so that they may attain to eternal life. It is, moreover, a free gift, not merited by natural good works; these, however, dispose us to receive Grace. There are two kinds of Grace:

1. Habitual or Sanctifying Grace is a supernatural quality dwelling in the soul by which man is made a partaker in the divine nature and capable of doing good works that merit eternal life. No one, not even infants, can enter heaven without it.

2. Actual or Transient Grace is the special help given us by God for some particular work, i.e. to overcome temptation, to know the true Faith, or to make an act of contrition. Without actual grace we cannot do good and shun evil for the sake of eternal life.

It is Actual Grace that begins the conversion of sinners by moving them to turn to God; and it is Habitual Grace that sanctifies the soul, expels sin and makes God present in us in a special way. This is expressed by saying that Habitual Grace justifies and sanctifies us. It washes away the guilt of sin and makes us agreeable in God's sight.

Again, Grace does not merely cleanse the soul of its stains, as a boy cleans his slate. No. In addition to removing the foulness of sin, it effects an inner change in the soul. Our "justification" by Faith is no mere covering up of our sins with a cloak. Luther held that we are, and remain, essentially wicked, and are justified in the eyes of God only by wrapping up ourselves in the merits of Christ. The Catholic doctrine of Grace emphatically denies any such mere extrinsic justification. After baptism we are not only cleansed from without, but, what is more important, we are renewed from within. The Council of Trent clearly laid down: "If anyone says that men are justified . . . to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them. . . . let him be anathema" (D. 821).

For the philosophically minded reader we may add here that Habitual Grace is no new substance placed in the soul, but a real quality or accident.

An accident in philosophy, is a thing which cannot exist by itself, but inheres in something else. Now since Grace cannot exist apart from angel or man, it must be looked upon as an accident. St. Thomas expressly tells us: "Since Grace transcends nature, it cannot be a substance, nor a substantial form, but is an accidental form of the soul itself," (1, 2, Q. 110). The Church, too, in many of her Councils, has defined Grace as something inhering in the soul. "The charity of God is poured forth by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those that are justified and is inherent therein." (Denz. 800.) Grace is not directly or properly created by God, as only substances are created; but is elicited from or produced in the soul.

As the great theologian Suarez also affirms: "Grace is produced by the transformation of man, since it is produced by justification, which is a transformation."

Therefore Grace is not created: a transformation is no creation, but in the strictest sense a change" (De Gratia, L. 8. C. 2 no. 9) .

Grace is Further a Quality.—A quality is an accident which inheres in a substance with some permanence and stability. Habitual Grace does not come and go like the wind. It is only when a man knowingly and willingly commits a mortal sin that Grace quits his soul.

Grace is a Habit.—We call habit a permanent quality which renders a thing well or ill disposed to its natural end. Thus health is a habit of the body, because it enables the body to perform its natural functions well. Grace, too, is a kind of spiritual health of the soul. It disposes us to act in a way conducive to our supernatural end. Grace is not an operative habit because it gives no facility or ease to the soul to perform virtuous acts. Much practice, for instance, on the piano or typewriter gives an operative habit in regard to these acts, but Grace gives no such facility to perform supernatural acts. This is done by various virtues infused in the soul.

Grace an Infused Habit.—It is plain that Grace cannot be a native or acquired habit of the soul. Native habits are inborn in us with our other natural or hereditary qualities. Since Grace is of a wholly supernatural character, it cannot come to us with our birth. Nor is grace an acquired habit, because no number of "naturally" virtuous acts can make the soul acquire it. Grace is a free gift from God and must be infused into us from above.

## 2. PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

What the soul is to the body, that Grace is to the soul. The soul gives vitality, and action to the body, so does grace give a supernatural life to the soul. When the soul departs, it leaves the body dead, lifeless and limp; when Grace departs, it leaves the soul without supernatural life and cut off from the supernatural order. The two lives in man—the natural and the supernatural—are independent of each other. A man may be going about his daily business and yet be supernaturally dead. If he is in the state of grievous sin, he may be sound in body and yet be as dead as a door nail in soul. On the other hand we may suffer physical death and yet be very much alive in spirit. Let us explain this further.

Natural and Supernatural.—In common parlance people understand by "natural," something genuine, unaffected, sincere. Thus the love of a mother for her child is "natural." A speaker who expresses himself in simple, direct and clear language is "natural." A boy who behaves honestly, with no attempt at showing off, no paralysing shyness, but with the easy grace and lightheartedness of youth, is "natural." Natural is sometimes opposed to acquired. We distinguish between man's natural and acquired powers. "Natural" is, further, taken as the equivalent of normal, in the sense of what generally, though not necessarily, happens. But in the philosophic or precise sense in which we here use the term, "natural" means something which belongs to the essence of a thing, or flows from its nature. In this sense it is natural for fire to burn, for water to seek its level, for cork to float, and for iron to sink in water. It would not be "natural" for a stream to run uphill back to its source, for stones to remain suspended in mid-air. But Grace is not natural to us; it is not due to, or does not flow from, our nature.

By "supernatural" people sometimes mean "super-human," or strange happenings which are not expected to occur in the usual course of events.

But in the philosophic sense it means something higher than the nature of a thing. This again may be "relatively" or "absolutely" supernatural. Anything above the nature of some created beings and not of others, is said to be "relatively" supernatural. Thus if a cow were to reason or an ass to speak, we should look upon this fact as only "relatively" supernatural; it is preternatural, or abnormal for brutes to reason, yet not so for man. But to exhibit a power which no created being naturally could possess, this we consider as absolutely supernatural. Such is the Beatific Vision in Heaven. The direct, face-to-face vision of God is neither due to any creature, nor even within its capacity. In this sense also Grace is absolutely supernatural, because God alone can communicate it. From this judge of the excellence of Grace!

The supernatural order, then, implies two things. First, it conveys the idea of a life and of gifts which are in no way due to, or deserved by, any created being. Secondly, Grace implies a state, or life which elevates man to a union with God on a plane above all created beings.

A Caution: The supernatural character of Grace is sometimes brought out by being put in antithesis to nature. But here the antithesis implies no contradiction. Grace does not destroy or supplant, but raises nature to a plane which lies beyond the reach of the powers of nature. Of ourselves we are nothing; but, when united to the divine, we assume something of the dignity of the Divine. "O Christian, know your divine dignity."

How the Transformation Takes Place.—Grace really transforms and defies human nature, although to outward seeming no change has been wrought. Not that we become identical with God (such an opinion would lead to Pantheism), but that we participate in some special manner in the very life and existence of God. The change is to us, not in Him. As light penetrates and suffuses the flawless crystal, so does God pervade, illumine and possess the soul. Holy Scripture exhausts the terms of endearment of the human language to express the relations that spring up between the soul vitalised by Grace and God, the Giver of Grace. The soul becomes the friend of God, the child of God, the spouse of God. Grace makes us one with Christ, Whose redeeming Passion has delivered us from the bonds of sin and restored the original divine sonship with which the first man, Adam, was privileged.

If Christians realized the wonders of Grace, they would find it easy to be detached from the world, to serve God, to

love their neighbour, and to practise that self-renunciation which is a condition for the unhampered growth of virtue and for the exercise of the zeal which should animate the friends of God.

### 3. GOD'S ADOPTED CHILDREN

As a consequence of sharing in God's life we become, in a degree difficult of full realization, the adopted sons of God. St. John, the disciple whom Jesus specially loved, has written most beautifully: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God." (I John 3, 1).

Our Divine Adoption.—If the king of England were to take a child of humble origin to Buckingham Palace and adopt him as his son, he would be doing a wonderful act of condescension and kindness. But behold in our divine adoption by Grace an infinitely more wonderful act of generosity on the part of God! He raises us from our nothingness and makes us more really His sons than any legal enactments could make an adopted youth the son of another man. According to Roman Law, when a child was adopted into a family, all the legal claims of his parents over him ceased and instead he assumed all the rights, privileges and dignities of the family into which he was adopted. Our divine adoption entails at least all the effects of legal adoption. But look into the matter more closely, and you will be agreeably surprised to find that God in His mercy establishes a still more intimate tie of relationship between us and Himself.

In our processes of legal adoption, the child who is adopted remains of foreign extraction and a stranger by blood. He still retains the features and qualities which have come to him with his birth. He can no more put away the physical characteristics of his parents and their blood which flows in his veins than a leopard can change his spots. No possible ceremony in the world can turn him into a blood relation of the family into which he is incorporated. But in the case of our divine adoption, the matter is quite different. Since the life and nature of God are communicated to us by Grace, we become His sons not merely by an extrinsic or artificial bond, but, what is more, by a most intimate tie of relationship with Him from within.

Scripture Warrant for it.—St. John, in the beginning of his gospel (Ch. 1, 12), beautifully says: "As many as received Him to them He gave power to be made the sons of God . . . who are born not of blood. . . but of God."

Writing to the Ephesians (Ch. 1, 5) St. Paul says: "Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ." To the Galatians he says, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them that were under the Law: that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father."

Again, writing to the Romans (Ch. 8, 14), St. Paul says: "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear: but you have received the spirit of adoption of son, whereby we cry: Abba, Father. For the spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God." What a tender tie of filial relationship these words express!

SS. Peter and John use the most forcible language to describe the reality of our intimacy with God by our divine adoption. They speak of us as being "born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible." "Whoever is born of God committeth not sin, for His seed abideth in him." They speak of us as being "grafted" on Christ, as being reborn, as being regenerated, and as "putting on" Christ. The Fathers of the Church also bear ample testimony to the wonderful change that comes over us.

Of course, we are not sons of God in that full sense in which Christ is the Son of God. But it is perfectly right to affirm that what Jesus Christ is by nature, that we become by Grace. Christ's Divine Sonship is on quite a different plane from ours, but that does not in any way diminish the reality of our affinity to God by Grace.

An Interesting Story.—A charming story is told of a governess who had to look after the Princess Louise of France. One day both were going out for a walk. In a fit of impatience the little princess turned to her nurse and said: "Why do you treat me like that: Know you that I am the daughter of your king?" The humble governess in reply quietly asked: "But know you not that I am the daughter of your God?" So this humble maid had realized the dignity of being the child of God by Grace.

It is also said that the words which most impressed St. Joan of Arc and persuaded her to take up her mission were: "Daughter of God." The voices urging her to go on her mission repeatedly addressed her as "Daughter of God,

daughter of God."

The Incarnation Gives Us This Sonship.—It is on account of God the Son becoming man that we have been raised to such a sublime dignity. "God sent His son, made of a woman ... that we might receive the adoption of sons." St. Fulgentius, commenting on this passage of St. Paul, says: "God was born of man that man might be born of God. The first birth of Christ, as the Son of God, was of God, and His second birth was of man; whereas our first birth is of man, and our second of God. What Christ was not in virtue of His first birth, that He became at His second birth, that we might also be made by the grace of our second birth what we were not by the first." St. Augustine, writing in the same strain, says: "The Son of God was made the son of Man that the children of men might be made the children of God."

The consequences of this doctrine are far-reaching. If we are the sons of God in a very real sense, then God is our Father and Christ is our Brother in a far deeper manner than we have ever dared to imagine. Moreover, all men in the state of grace acquire a spiritual kinship among themselves which is far more real than that acquired by descent from one common parent—Adam. Christ is the spiritual Head of the human race, just as Adam is in the natural order. If this Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man were better understood by men, how soon would not wars and strifes and national antipathies and caste distinctions, cease! We are each of us only what we are in the eyes of God and the rest matters little. Now in the eyes of God there is only one noble race or caste, those who have received divine adoption.

To be the child of God is to be the child of Destiny, for God is Destiny—the power that governs the future.

#### **4. "HEIRS OF HEAVEN"**

We all know what it means to be the heir to an estate. It means that the inheritor has an effective claim over the lands willed to him, and they will come in his actual possession at the death of the present owner. The Christian, too, in virtue of the order of things which Christ in His infinite goodness has established, can lay full claim to an eternal reward in Heaven, if he dies in the state of sanctifying grace. The Christian, therefore, does not look forward to Heaven as to a foreign land, but as to an assured inheritance to which Christ gives him every right and claim. Thus a passport authorizes a man to enter a foreign territory, or the title-deeds give a man the power to take possession of his property.

The Connection Between Grace and Glory.—It is the common teaching of Catholic Divines that in order to be capable of enjoying the Beatific Vision, the soul must first be endowed with the "lumen gloriæ," or the "light of glory." The soul cannot with its mere natural powers enjoy the direct face-to-face Vision of God, or feel the entrancing Beatitude of Heaven, any more than a marble statue can enjoy the fine sights and fragrant odours of the garden in which it is placed. Scientists tell us that there are certain sounds in the forests and groves which are completely beyond the range of our hearing, because our ears have not been adapted to take them in. Similarly, there is so great a disproportion between the ravishing joys of Paradise and our faculty for enjoying them, that unless God endowed us with the "light of glory," we should be absolutely incapable of contemplating face to face the infinite splendour of His august majesty.

Now, we are told that this "light of glory" is nothing else than the efflorescence of the sanctifying grace with which the soul has left this world. Proof of it is, that little children who have died without the grace of Baptism and adults who have died in a state of mortal sin, will not be given this "light of glory," and will, in consequence, be absolutely excluded from the Beatific Vision. Moreover, it is the common teaching of the theologians that the degree and measure of our happiness in Heaven will be in proportion to the amount of sanctifying grace with which we shall have died. All this shows that there is an intrinsic connection between grace and glory. Grace has sometimes been called the "seed of glory," because it is this same sanctifying grace in our souls with which we shall die that will ultimately grow into the "light of glory." Referring to this grace in the soul, St. John writes: "Whosoever is born of God committeth not sin: for His seed abideth in him" (Jn..iii., 9).

Rejoice, then, Christian heart, in being the inheritor of Heaven in so real a sense by the possession of Grace! Let your exultation know no bounds, because even as the eye takes in the morning light when the night recedes and sleep departs, so surely will you succeed to an eternal heirloom in Heaven if you die in the state of grace. "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners," St. Paul tells the Ephesians (2, 19), "but you are fellow-citizens of the saints and the domestics of God." And to the Romans (8, 17) : "The Spirit Himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God, and if sons, heirs also: heirs indeed of God and joint-heirs with Christ."

## 5. GRACE INCORPORATES US WITH GOD

But the grandest and most glorious thing which Grace does for us is that it incorporates us with Christ. Speaking of the Sacraments which are the channels of God's grace into our hearts, Fr. C. Lattey writes: "I want to stress the fact that the Sacraments do more than allow us to touch the hem of Christ's garment and thereby be cured; they actually incorporate us in Christ, so that we become in a very real sense one with Him." To incorporate, according to any dictionary, means to form into one body, to mix into one mass, or to unite so as to form part of another body. If Christ cured us of our spiritual maladies merely from without, as He cured the people of Galilee by the touch of His hand or the word of His mouth, it would be a great benefit. He does infinitely more for us. He enters into a most intimate union with us by Grace and revivifies us from within.

Here we reach the kernel or central idea of the doctrine of Grace, and, for the matter of that, of the whole Christian religion.

Christ the Life of the World.—On many occasions Jesus Christ proclaimed Himself to be the life of the world. In John x, 10, we read: "I am come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." In another place, too, Christ says: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Now in what sense is Christ the Life of the world? No doubt Christ is our life in the sense that He was born and died for us, and thereby became the cause of our salvation: "He became to all that obey Him the cause of eternal salvation" (Hebrew v, 9) . But there is another and deeper sense in which Christ is our life. Even here and now, during our earthly sojourn, He gives us a new life. "He that has the Son has life, he that has not the Son has not life" (I John v, 12). Remark that St. John does not use the future, but the present tense.

Incorporation Explained.—This life referred to is none other than our supernatural life of grace. Christ does not work upon us as the wind acts upon the sails of a ship, as a seal leaves its impression on wax, or as petrol sets the engines of a car in motion. No, His activity upon us is internal and from within. He acts upon us more as a living organism acts upon particles of matter and draws them into union with itself. Just as animals or men take in particles of food and assimilate them into their own substances, so Christ incorporates us into Himself. Christ's wonderful figure of the Vine brings out this truth very beautifully: "Abide in Me: and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me, I am the vine, you the branches. He that abides in Me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. xii, 5). It is especially at the time of Holy Communion that this union with Christ becomes most intense and intimate. Hence the words of Our Lord, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you . . . . He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." St. Thomas draws our attention to the difference in effect between our natural food and the Eucharistic Banquet. In the case of our natural food, he says, we assimilate it to our flesh and blood, but in the case of our heavenly food, the Eucharist transforms him who receives it into Itself.

1. Proofs of Our Incorporation.—St. Paul is par-excellence the apostle of this doctrine of our incorporation in Christ. Abbot Vonier has calculated that he uses the phrase "In Christ Jesus" not less than eighty times. Just as St. John in his gospel is the whole time at pains to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so this doctrine of our incorporation is the outstanding subject in the writings of St. Paul. He comes back on it over and over again. His two favourite comparisons are those of the building, and of the body.

(a) Just as the various walls and pillars in a building do not form isolated entities, but become parts of the whole edifice, so do we become incorporated in Christ by Grace.

"You are no longer strangers . . . but very members of the family of God, built as you are on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of whom Jesus Christ is the corner-stone. It is in that the whole well-ordered building arises and forms a holy temple in the Lord." As Fr. Lattey points out: "Christ has made us, poor scattered pebbles, the stones of a great building, an organic and living building of which He is become the living corner-stone."

(b) But St. Paul's most characteristic simile is that of the body. "As the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. The body also is not one member, but many."

"You are the body of Christ and you are the members, each in his way."

"Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ? He Who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (I Cor. vi, 15, 17). Perhaps the most striking passage is to be found in I Cor. xii, 4-end:

"Now there are diversities of graces, but the same spirit. And there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but the same God, Who worketh all in all . . . . For in one spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jew or Gentiles, whether bond or free . . . . and in one spirit we have all been made to drink . . . . If the foot should say I am not the hand . . . is it therefore not of the body."

2. The Difference Between the Old and the New Testament.—As we all know, Testament means pact, alliance, agreement, contract. The contract in the Old Alliance between God and His people was that He would give them peace, prosperity and every temporal blessing on condition that they kept His commandments. If the Israelites disobeyed His Law, He would send them drought, famine, war, and every temporal misery. But in the New Alliance the link between God and His people was to be different. By His temporal life and death Christ was to merit for us Grace and thereby become the new supernatural Head of the human race. He was to unite us to God in a new way by making us share in the Divine Life. The New Alliance was to introduce a new era of love, mercy and benignity. Evidently, this new link between God and His people is far superior to that of the Old Testament. In the New Testament God has invited us to a close and intimate union with Him.

3. The Universal Law of Charity.—Why are Christians so frequently urged to love one another? Why are they obliged to love even their enemies? What is this New Commandment of Love which Christ has imposed upon His followers, "Love one another as I have loved you." "If any man says he loves God and hates his brother, the same is a liar." By this shall all men know that you are My disciples that you have love for one another." This was to be the distinguishing mark of Christ's followers. What people saw the early Christians, they exclaimed in wonder: "Behold how they love one another!"

At the last Judgement Christ will say: "Come ye blessed of My Father, possess you the Kingdom prepared for you . . . . When I was hungry, you gave Me to eat, when I was thirsty, you gave Me to drink, when I was naked, you clothed Me .... Then the just will say: Lord, when did we see You hungry and gave You to eat, when did we see You thirsty and gave You to drink .... Then the Lord will answer and say: As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me . . . ." (St. Matthew, Ch. xxv). This and other passages clearly prove our intimate union with Christ. We are as closely related to each other by bonds of supernatural grace as the members of the same family are related to each other by blood. There is the same supernatural grace flowing through the souls of all who are in the state of grace. We come from the same Father and Creator; we have His own Life flourishing within us; so we are bound to love one another. Christ wished and prayed for this unity amongst men with all His Heart. We have but to recall His beautiful prayer to His Heavenly Father: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name . . . that they may be one, as We also are .... As Thou Father in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me . . . that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them and I in them" (St. John, Ch. 16). In some wonderful way, therefore, all who have been redeemed become one with Christ and incorporated in Him. We might examine here all the seven Sacraments and show how each of them unites us closer to God by bestowing on us, each in its own way, a new infusion of Grace. They also go to show how our prayers and actions become almost infinite in value by being offered through Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body.

## **6. TEMPLES OF THE HOLY GHOST"**

God's Natural Presence.—We all know that God is everywhere, in Heaven, on earth and even in hell. He gives existence and activity to every creature. But this we may call the casual presence of God, as He is the cause of all created beings and of their actions. God is also omnipresent by His knowledge; everything is open to His mind and chiefly present by His substance, which is infinite and spiritual. But mind that spirits are not present like bodies, different parts of which occupy different parts of space. Spirits having no parts are wholly present wherever they are, and so is God. This threefold divine presence—by power, knowledge and substance—is God's natural or common presence.

God's Supernatural Presence.—Holy Scripture, moreover, proves the fact of God communicating His life and nature to us by Grace. "As many of us as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ" (Gal. iii, 27). "We have been grafted on Christ" (Rom. vi' 5). Christ Himself affirms that He and the Father abide in a very special manner in the heart of the righteous man: "If any man love Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will

come to him and make Our abode with him." But perhaps the most striking passage in this connection is that of St. Peter's, where he says that by grace we become partakers of the Divine Nature and sharers in His Divine Life (II Epistle, i, 4.)

The newness which God's special presence adds to His natural presence in us may be brought out by a comparison. It is as if a new electric current had been induced into our beings and transformed us into superior beings. In her "Interior Castle," St. Teresa describes this special indwelling of God by the following comparison. "If," she says, "some of us were seated in a well-lighted room, and if the lights were suddenly to go out, we should still feel aware of one another's presence in the room though we did not see each other." By this presence of God in us we are even now:

Living Temples of God.—As St. Paul says: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in You? But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are." How highly, therefore, must we not love and treasure Grace, since by it no less a dignitary than His infinite Majesty comes to take up His abode in the lowly dwelling of our hearts!

New Gifts and Virtues.—Besides the special indwelling of God in our souls Grace is the source of new powers given to our various faculties. Some of these powers relate immediately to God; they are Faith, Hope and Charity (I Cor. 13, 13). Others relate to ourselves and our neighbour; they are Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude (Wisdom 7, 7). By Grace we are the children of God; by the infused virtues we are able to act as children of God, and by our good works we merit eternal life.

For the worthy performance of our good works God gives us actual graces and also special gifts, such as Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and the Fear of the Lord (Isaias 11, 2.)

So many jewels adorn the soul of the just! So many helps are given us to walk in a way worthy of God! This is why we are told in the Gospel: "Be you, therefore, perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (St. Matthew 5, 48.)

## **7. DECEIVED BY APPEARANCES**

Let us not, therefore, be deceived by appearances. The earth, to all appearances, seems to be much bigger than the sun, or seems to be flat, or seems to be gone round by the sun; but we know that it is the sun which is in reality nearly a million times larger than the earth, that it is the earth which is going round the sun, and that the earth is not flat but round. In a similar way, the riches, honours and pleasures of this world might appear to us to be much more valuable than Grace because of their proximity to us; but in reality it is the supernatural order which is of inestimably greater value than anything in the material or even spiritual order. God might seem to be far away and Grace might seem to be of little worth, but let us not be guided by our senses in these matters, Faith and reason must teach us otherwise.

St. Thomas, as we have said, looked upon matter as merely the "tail-end" of God's wonderful creation. The magnificence and splendour of all the visible world was to him nothing compared to the Grace in a single man. The beauties and marvels of our visible creation are evanescent, whereas Grace is imperishable. The eminent theologian, Lessuis, goes even further and says that even if all the perfections of our earth were infinite, they would still be of less value than the least degree of Grace.

In the Imitation of Christ we read that many are deceived under the appearances of good. The more we reflect on this doctrine of Grace, the more we shall find how greatly we were mistaken in our standards of judgement. All the beauties and pleasures of the earth are mere trifles compared to the spiritual treasures of heaven.

St. Augustine says that not only the wonderful beauties and perfections of our earth, but even all the spiritual grandeur and excellence of heaven and the angels are of less value than Grace. The reason he gives is because all the natural perfections of the earth and of the angels are only perfections created out of nothing, whereas Grace proceeds from God. St. Thomas, too, in one place teaches that Grace is of greater value than the soul itself.

Grace Inseparable from God.—One reason assigned by the Divines why Grace is of such priceless value is because it is inseparable from God. We can no more separate Grace from God than we can separate light from the sun. The two are most intimately connected with each other.

Grace has been said to be of greater value than the gift of miracles, because miracles are performed only in visible creation, whereas Grace perfects and enhances the imperishable order. Saints have said that it is a greater achievement

to convert a sinner that to create heaven and earth. Or, to put it as St. Augustine expressed it, we do a greater work with God's help in converting ourselves than God does in creating us, because the immediate consequences of our creation are conditional, but the conversion of our souls is fraught with everlasting consequences. Other Fathers of the Church extol Grace in other striking ways. St. Ambrose calls it: "A splendid painting made by God Himself" St. Chrysostom compares the soul in a state of grace to "A statue of gold," St. Cyril calls it: "A divine sea." St. Basil: "A shining light." St. Thomas says that Grace beautifies the soul like a divine light.

Human Blindness.—How comes it, then, I ask, that men are so purblind as to be indifferent about Grace? In the words of Shakespeare:

*"O judgement, thou art fled to brutish beasts  
And men have lost their reason."*

What witchcraft has so poisoned and dulled the judgement of men as to make them prefer the glittering tinsel of earthly goods to the everlasting joy of heaven? Even men famed for their practical sense, shrewd judgement and matter of fact methods in business, show colossal ignorance and supreme indifference in regard to the things of God.

To what pains a man puts himself in order to acquire accomplishments in the physical or intellectual order! With what diligence the athlete endeavours to develop his form, or obtain speed in running. He regulates his diet, refrains his appetites, painfully exercises himself every day to strengthen his muscles. For a perishable crown or fleeting triumph he does so much and yet he will probably not even lift a finger for the sake of Heaven! Other men spend many years at a university or a school of art to perfect their mind and hand. Behold the painter, sculptor or musician, painfully bending hour after hour over his task, all in order to produce a masterpiece in stone or marble or on canvas. The perfections of a far inferior order attract man, whereas Grace which is of higher value than the perfection of the highest angels had no attraction for him. Who would prefer a shining copper coin to a genuine sovereign in gold? And yet this is what man does when he wastes his time in trivial pursuits. Every time the devil tempts man to rob, steal, drink, or do some other evil deed, he offers man a counterfeit coin. Man grabs at it as a child reaches out to a glittering bauble. The fact is the world is too much with us; and hence we are unable to put things in their proper place and gauge them at their right value. In offering man Grace, God offers him a diamond, and man prefers a lump of clay. Is it another instance of throwing pearls before swine? It is at least a striking proof of our mental limitations.

But on the contrary, O Christian, forget not your dignity! It is more exalted and substantial than that of kings and mighty conquerors. The privileges of the Christian are not confined to the body, nor limited by time. They apply to the soul—they are enjoyed in time and last for ever.

A sinner saved by Grace—admitted to fellowship with the Most High—made the son of God—guided with infallible wisdom and omnipotence—his name written in the Book of Life—called to heaven there to receive the crown of immortality and a palm of eternal victory! What can better employ the mind than the frequent contemplation of these glorious realities?

## **8. PRACTICAL QUESTIONS**

So much for the theory of Grace. Let me now turn to some practical questions which have turned up when discussing this matter with people.

**1. When are Men in the State of Grace?**—Christian children are put in the state of grace by the reception of baptism. If the baptized child should die before it reaches the use of reason, its soul would wing its flight straight to Heaven and enjoy the Beatific Vision of God for all eternity. Other children who die before the age of reason would go to a place called Limbo; where they would not enjoy the face-to-face vision of God, but only some natural happiness. After coming to the use of reason, if a Christian commits a grievous sin, he forfeits the state of grace and is at enmity with God. He must make an act of contrition, confess and be sorry for his sins in order to recover the state of grace. Unbaptized grown-up people receive from God help (i.e., actual graces) to prepare themselves by prayer and good works to receive divine adoption.

The necessary dispositions include *faith*. Without faith it is impossible to please God . . . we must believe (on God's own authority) that He exists and rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 9, 6). *Fear of God*: "He that is without fear cannot be justified" (Eccli. 1, 28). *Sorrow* for having offended God: "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all

likewise perish" (Luke 13, 3). *Love of God*: St. John says: He that loves not abides in death." (1 Epistle 13, 3) .

Even the most ignorant person who at the moment of death makes acts of faith, love of God and resignation to His Divine Will can obtain eternal salvation. God will never punish involuntary ignorance. This minimum of good dispositions could be expressed in simple words thus: "My God, I believe in Thee and all that Thou wouldst have me believe because Thou hast told us. I hope from Thee, because of Thy mercy and Thy promises, all that I need to come to Thee in heaven. I love Thee with all my heart because Thou art infinitely good and worthy of all love and therefore I am sorry for having offended Thee. Help me to do Thy Holy Will. Amen."

## **2. How Much Grace and Merit is Recovered after repenting of a grievous sin?**

All the merits previously acquired recover their value by justification; but as to the degree of grace possessed before the grievous sin and after obtaining its forgiveness there is a difference of opinion.

Some hold that Grace is given back and the previous merits revive in proportion to the disposition of the person at the time of justification.

Others, again, of a more liberal view, maintain that if the contrition is very intense and pleasing to God, we may get now even a greater degree of sanctifying grace than we had before our fall into sin. The reason they give is that we thus make greater efforts after perfection, than we would have done if we had never fallen into sin.

It is in a similar sense, no matter how paradoxical it may sound, that Pascal said: "Hell peoples Heaven." The fear of Hell has made many people go to Heaven who otherwise perhaps would not have gone there.

In confirmation of their theory the defenders of this liberal school also quote that passage where it is said: "There is more joy in Heaven over the tear-wet face of one repentant sinner than over the snowy-white robes of the hundred who are just."

**3. Can We Increase Grace in Our Hearts?**—Most certainly. All can daily increase their store of sanctifying grace, once they have established themselves in the state of grace. All their acts of prayer, penance, mortification, self-denial, almsdeeds, etc., can bring them closer to God and merit for them a higher degree of glory in heaven. Theologians sometimes make use of the comparison of the camera. The more we open the aperture of the camera, the greater and the bigger will be the picture thrown on the plate behind. In a similar way the more we increase in Grace the greater will be our capacity for seeing God in heaven. Hence, the real and enormous value of time for us. If a miser were told he could increase his fortune from \$100 to 1000 or 10,000 per month for all eternity by the performance of a fast, how eagerly would he not jump at the opportunity? And yet this is what God offers us for our penances, sacrifices and sufferings in time. The better we serve Him, the greater will be the reward, not for one day, one month, or year, but, for millions of years and beyond. We shall be enjoying this immense happiness, not one day after another, in succession, but the whole weight of our happiness will be put upon us at every moment of eternity. Just as it is not necessary to touch a big iron ball on all its surface in order to feel its full weight, but it is enough to balance it at one point on our finger, so, in Heaven, we shall enjoy all our happiness at each and every moment of eternity. The saints had a right perspective of the value of things, so they counted it joy to renounce all earthly dignities, pleasures and riches.

Let us, like them, try and increase our treasure of Grace in every possible way. Reflect, every Mass we hear, every Communion we receive, every renunciation we make, every prayer we offer up, every alms we give, will bring us an increase of Grace which will augment our happiness in Heaven for years without end. Looked at in this light, the sacrifices we may have to make in the observance of God's commandments will not be difficult, but will become light and easy. As St. Paul assured the Corinthians (II Ch. 4) : "What is at present momentary and light of our tribulation works for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory . . . . The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

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