

Perfected In Grace: The Lord is with You

Deacon Jim Munno

Deacon Jim began his talk by going over several potential titles for the series to convey the enormity of the subject matter: Knowing the Creator better, knowing ourselves better and knowing the relationship of man and Creator even better. So, the first title was "**Theosis**" focusing on the words of St. Athanasius "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." This realization that we are to become God is at once shocking and confounding. A second title Deacon Jim thought of was "**Deification**" again quoting St. Athanasius "For those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinized." We sometimes speak of God sanctifying us, making us holier, which is just a gentler way of saying He is making us Christ-like, which is a gentler way of saying He is making us God-like. Deification is the process by which God tries to make us like Him! However the word "deification" too closely resembles the word "divination," where we try to act like God, which is altogether a different and dangerous notion. Next, Deacon Jim tried "**Full of Grace**" but finally settled on "**Perfected in Grace**," because perfection in grace IS our deification.

Deacon Jim next went over the individual topics for the series. Unlike last year's series which walked us through Lent, this series is not meant to be a path through Lent, but rather a perspective to keep in mind all the time as we journey through Lent, a perspective of how we look at ourselves and how we look at God. The series will walk us through the sacraments given to us for our sanctifying grace, from the perspective of making us more Christ-like, more God-like, to divinize us. The individual topics can be found in the slides linked on the talk web page or linked directly [HERE](#). The slides are an excellent resource, and much of this summary will link directly back to information contained on these slides. Deacon Jim then began with today's topic: "The Lord is With You." Allowing ourselves to be divinized by God is a hard task, but fear not, the Lord is with us. The angel Gabriel said these very words to Mary, but many in the Old Testament facing difficult tasks heard this same message from angels. Let us take them to heart as well.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE: From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), we learn that "The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature." (see slide #10 for the full quote from CCC 460). And from several New Testament epistles, we learn that "We Shall be Like Him." Slide 12 lists quotes from the epistles of Peter, John and Paul (Corinthians). We become as a son of God. The Lord gives us the "**power**" to be born to be children of God, to share in His divine nature. Our human nature is separate and completely different from God's divine nature, but He wants us to share His nature with Him. From St. Peter, we learn that God has "granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." Everything is there for us. All things that pertain to life and godliness are granted to us. St. John tells us that "we are God's children now." We all have the capacity of the purity of Christ. Being Christ-like is much more than imitating Christ's behaviors — we are to BE LIKE Christ. The object is not to behave like Christ, it is to literally be like Christ who is God and human. If we achieve this goal, we are guaranteed to behave like Him. In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, He speaks of a new creation in baptism. Baptism is much more than forgiveness of all sins. At baptism, the divinity of God is infused into us: We become a new creation, something completely different, God divinizing us, making us God-like!

It can be difficult to describe exactly what is meant by "Partakers of the Divine Nature," so it can be helpful to examine what it does NOT mean. We do not add to God. We do not pantheistically meld with the universe (become "one" with the universe), we do not cease to be human beings and become gods as expressed in the Mormon doctrine of exaltation, nor do we simply change our behaviors. As mentioned previously, we become a new creation.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GRACE: Deacon Jim used Mary as an example of grace — she was "full of grace" and "the Lord was with her." So what is grace exactly? It is a free, unmerited favor. On slide 14, Deacon Jim shared passages from the CCC on grace. "Grace is a participation in the life of God" (CCC 1997) and "... It depends entirely on God's gratuitous initiative" (CCC 1998).

Deacon Jim then spent some time on the word "**kecharitōménē**," the verb used by St. Luke to describe Mary as full of grace. The word is extremely rare, and used only one other time in the Bible, in Ephesians 1:6 — "to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." He went on to quote a beautiful commentary from St. John Chrysostom on this line from Ephesians that can be found on slides 16-19. In summary, "He [God] has not only released us from our sins, but has also made us fitting objects of His love." The emphasis is on the completeness of our transformation. "It is thus that God has arrayed and adorned this soul of ours, and clothed it with beauty, and rendered it an object of His delight and love."

Then on Slide 20, he applied the meaning of "**kecharitōménē**" to **Mary**. Mary has been, and still is the object of divine benevolence (grace). She was granted supernatural grace and remains in this state. The verb implies the continuation of a completed action. Grace takes away sin, so Mary was preserved free from sin. She was entirely transformed by the grace of God, which was complete in her. If she had had sin, grace would have been lacking in her.

CAN WE BE FULL OF GRACE LIKE MARY?: Mary is an ideal for us. Jesus as God, became man, He came down from heaven to be a slave. Mary as human, at her conception was elevated to become God-like. This is what God wants for every one of us — a glorified body, a glorified soul. God is continuously at work in each of us. Through our free will, we can cooperate with Him, or not. Deacon Jim reminded us in this Lenten season that penance is more than sorrow for our sins, but a **reorientation** of our lives towards God. Two good questions to ask ourselves are: How are we going to reorient our lives toward God in everything we do? And, are we doing this in cooperation with God trying to divinize us? Deacon Jim encouraged us to be "**selfish**" this Lent — to bring ourselves to Christ like we have never done before, maybe for lack of knowledge, or lack of understanding, or lack of will.

- So, can we be full of grace like Mary? No! We did not have sanctifying grace, and other graces at our conception like she did.
- So, can we be full of grace like Mary? Yes! We are made in the image and likeness of God. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit — we become a new creation at baptism. God has a plan for fullness of grace for each one of us.
- So, can we be full of grace like Mary? No! We cannot be full of grace like Mary, but we can be full of grace like we are meant to be, and that is separate and unique for each one of us.

THE THREE PILLARS OF LENT POWERED BY GRACE:

- **Prayer:** Prayer is communion with God. Let our prayer focus on the indwelling of the Spirit, pray about our divinization.
- **Almsgiving:** Seek almsgiving that is alive with divine life, the divine life God shares with us. Share the divine life that has been shared with us with others.
- **Fasting:** Fasting detaches us from self-love and from love of the world, each of which quell the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Choose a fasting that does NOT suppress the indwelling of the life of God within us.

NEXT WEEK: "Those in Whom the Spirit Dwells" namely those who are divinized, including a look at baptism and how it begins the process of divinization.

Recalling this week's theme, remember that the Lord is with us in this divinization process. Let that give us strength, courage, resolve and joy.