

Perfected In Grace: Those in whom the Spirit Dwells

Deacon Jim Munno — 2024-02-22

Deacon Jim highly recommended that if we had not had a chance to listen to the first installment of this series, we do so, as it contains foundational material important for all following talks. Deacon Jim began by reviewing this entire series, reminding us that last week we looked at "The Lord is with [us]," maybe in a way we had never thought of before. We looked at the deification of the human person, grace, and Mary as a lens to better understand the meaning of "Perfected in Grace." After briefly going over each talk in the series, he went over the agenda for today's talk (see slide). As last week, this summary will make ample use of the excellent slides provided by Deacon Jim, which can be found on the talk web [PAGE](#) or directly [HERE](#).

A LITTLE MORE ON DEIFICATION — Deacon Jim began today's topic with an extended quote from St. Irenaeus on deification (the process whereby God tries to make us like Him). St. Irenaeus tells us that "there was no other way for us to receive incorruptibility and immortality than to be united to incorruptibility and immortality." And the only way to be UNITED with them is through God taking on our humanity in Jesus. If we had incorruptibility, we would no longer be tempted to sin, for we would see our sins for how truly detestable they are, rather than be attracted to them. "In His immeasurable love, He became what we are in order to make us what He is." St. Irenaeus is coupling our deification with the incarnation. God's plan was that Jesus take on our nature, and share His nature with us, so that we may be one with Him in the Mystical Body of Christ, and so that the goal of being in union with Him in heaven is achievable. NO ONE can enter the Kingdom of God "without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). Baptism is the doorway into the Kingdom of God.

GOD'S PLAN FOR US FROM THE BEGINNING — Last week, we talked at some length about the Greek words "kecharitomene" and "echaritosen" which both have the same root. These words are used in only two places in the New Testament: at Mary's annunciation (Luke 1:28) and by St. Paul in Ephesians (1:6). In both cases, the verb is used in the causative sense, where the action affects something in the object, not only in the past, but in the present as well. The action is on-going, and so the changes brought about by grace (charis) are persistent. Deacon Jim reminded us once again of St. John Chrysostom's beautiful quote about how man is regenerated, transfigured, glorified by grace as seen in the vision of the leper transformed into a "graceful youth, surpassing all mankind in beauty." This regeneration is God's plan for us from the very beginning, for ALL of us. While we can only express this transformation in human ways, it can only truly be understood in divine ways.

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM — This "adornment of the soul, clothing it in beauty..." begins at baptism. Deacon Jim then reminded us of St. Athanasius' quote which forms the title of this talk — "Those in Whom the Spirit Dwells are divinized." From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): "Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we take part in Christ's Passion by dying to sin, and in his Resurrection by being born to a new life; we are members of his Body which is the Church, branches grafted onto the vine which is himself (see slide 13 for more details). The Catechism of the Catholic Church discusses baptism at great length. The Church has dealt with the topic of baptism throughout its history, particularly within the Council of Florence (1438-1445). The purpose for the council's focus on baptism was to seek clarity for church unification, as many churches had different ways of describing baptism, and what it meant. In the process of discussing their differences, they came to the truth of their common understanding and belief. Deacon Jim finds the seeking of clarity both beautiful and scary. Scary because everything is so well defined, it is easy to unintentionally fall into heresy when restating in one's own words.

A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward grace (a partaking of the divine nature), instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. We will be looking at all the sacraments because they all confer grace. We begin today with baptism. From the CCC, baptism is "the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments."

THE GRACES OF BAPTISM

- We are freed from all sin, and reborn as children of God. It is the sacrament of regeneration. In baptism, ALL sins are forgiven, as well as punishment for sin. Deacon Jim then went over several more quotes from the CCC (see slides 14-16).
- We become a new creation (see quotes from CCC on slides 17 -18). We become co-heirs with Christ. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit. We go to the temple to encounter God. Now we ourselves are places where we encounter God. We receive sanctifying grace, the grace of justification. We begin the journey of being like Christ, not just behaving like Him. The theological virtues of faith, hope and love are infused in us, so we can believe in God, hope in Him, and love Him. We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit at baptism, completed in confirmation. Baptism allows us to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.
- We are incorporated into the Church, as St. Paul teaches us — of many parts, one body, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church.
- We are sealed with an indelible spiritual mark. We are sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit. This mark cannot be removed. In ancient Rome, a seal meant "under both the authority and protection of that seal. Likewise, we are under the authority and the protection of God.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM SAY ABOUT US? — In Mark (1:10-11), at the baptism of Jesus, God says "You are my beloved Son." We can imagine God saying these exact same words to each of us at our baptism! We become co-heirs with Christ, participating in His death, in His resurrection, in His everything, including His baptism. Do we really believe all this? It is too much for us sometimes, reflective of the superabundant gifts of God. We are lavished with the gifts of God — at our human level, it is too much. We must elevate our expectation to a higher level, through Jesus' merits, and participation in His life.

A LENTEN PERSPECTIVE — Deacon Jim concluded his talk by revisiting the three pillars of Lent powered by grace:

- **PRAYER:** We ARE temples of the Holy Spirit — we need to recognize that reality when we pray and preserve that temple in all we do.
- **ALMSGIVING:** We are the body of Christ. Be Christ in the world.
- **FASTING:** Do not love the things of the world — love the Lord with all our hearts, beings, strengths, minds, and love our neighbors as ourselves. Fasting is NOT about deprivations: Rather it is about drawing us deeper into love of God and neighbor. We give up something to gain something greater.

NEXT WEEK: LIFE IN CHRIST, LIFE IN SPIRIT — We will continue discussing baptism, and also discuss confirmation and the necessity of the life of virtue to grow in Christ.

As a final note, from a question: For those of us concerned about loved ones who are not baptized, let us never forget that God neglects no one. God desires that everyone be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth. God pursues us ALL continuously no matter what condition in life we are in, the baptized and the unbaptized. HE always tries to draw us in!