

Perfected In Grace: Life in Christ, Life in the Spirit

Deacon Jim Munno — 2024-02-29

As in prior weeks, we will make good use of the excellent slides Deacon Jim provided, which can be found on the talk web page [HERE](#) or linked directly [HERE](#). Deacon Jim once again gave an overview of the series, beginning with week 1 where we were told to have courage, the Lord is with us in our process of deification. In week 2, we talked about "those in whom the Spirit dwells," namely the baptized, and how we become a new creation, a process that begins in baptism and is completed in confirmation. There will be more in this talk on what actually gets started in baptism and how confirmation completes it. This talk is about the the life of virtue. Living the life of virtue is such a high priority, Deacon Jim wants to lay a solid foundation in order to help us see the value in living such a life. In fact, he said if we remember only one thing from this talk, let be that we are called to live the life of virtue. He then briefly discussed the rest of the series. God initiates the process of our deification, but the process requires our cooperation by living a life of virtue. From Thomas Aquinas, we learn "The gifts of the Spirit will lie dormant in the soul unless acted upon by a life of virtue, especially the virtue of love."

Deacon Jim continued with a brief review of last week, and baptism as the basis of the whole Christian life, as the gateway to receiving the Holy Spirit, as the door which gives access to the other sacraments, where we are reborn as children of God, become a new creation, joined with Jesus Christ, the son of God. The Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace. We are infused with the theological gifts of faith, hope and love. This love is much more than what our language can convey: It is "agape" love, a giving love, a transcendent love that enables us to share with others. And we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and grow in goodness through the moral virtues. "The adornment of the soul" referenced by John Chrysostom begins at baptism and baptism begins deification.

THE QUESTION NO ONE ASKED LAST WEEK — Deacon Jim then spent a little time going over the question he was anticipating last week that never got asked. From scripture, "Amen, amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). Are we truly saying the unbaptized do not go to heaven, and that outside the Church there is no salvation? Those who know what it is to be joined to the mystical Body of Christ and refuse it, the Catechism is telling us, and echoing the words of Jesus, that there is no entry. But it is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ or His church. There are many people who have never heard of Christ at all or may have heard of Christ, but have been raised in a way that they do not understand the gospel or that they have been raised to reject the gospel. These people who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart and moved by grace and try in their actions to do His will as they know it through their conscience may achieve eternal salvation. (See slides for more information and quotations from the Catechism of the Catholic Church 846 and 848). In Baptism, since there is an outpouring of grace, it would be easy to conclude that without the sacrament, there is no grace. God is not restricted by His sacraments! The sacraments are a promise of grace, but that does mean that He cannot bestow and does not bestow His grace on people worldwide. The Church still has the obligation to evangelize. ALL who are in heaven have undergone deification, and are part of Christ. God alone knows how to make that deification happen in the unbaptized.

ANOTHER QUESTION FROM LAST WEEK — Deacon Jim discussed a question that came up via email: How can human nature be so strong as to squash the divine nature we have been instilled with? It does not. Our human nature does not squash or suppress the divine nature. The divine nature that is in us is so "polite," so "kind," it will always yield to our choices. It is not a forceful putting down of the promptings of the Spirit. There is no battle of strengths. God wants all of us to be saved, but He gives all of us the freedom to say no. We have free will and it is our choice whether we respond to the Spirit's invitation. We need to reflect on love and free will. God IS love. We are being deified, so in some way, we become love too. Love is freely given. God is asking us for our love, for ALL of our being. If we love God with everything we are, we are completing the process of deification, becoming God-like. Our nature is not squashing the divine nature in us, it is our choice to ignore the Divine calling us to be divine. It is our choice to remain sinful, to remain in love with the world, in love with ourselves.

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT — The sanctifying gifts of the Holy Spirit help us to be more Christ-like, to live a life of virtue. We must LIVE this life. For example to have compassion (suffer with) with someone, if we have never suffered, we cannot have compassion. We have to LIVE a life in cooperation with the promptings of the Holy Spirit, a life that flows from these gifts. Details on the gifts can be found in the slides, and we include some brief highlights from Deacon Jim's talking points here.

1. **WISDOM:** It involves finding the deeper meaning, seeing God's hand in all things.

2. **UNDERSTANDING:** With this gift, we comprehend how we need to live in order to follow Christ, and we are not confused by the conflicting messages of the world. We have a penetrating insight into Truth. What is Truth? Truth is that which is in accord with reality.
3. **COUNSEL:** It is right judgment, knowing the difference between right and wrong and choosing to do what is right. It is avoiding sin. Relativism creeps in here when people claim what might be right for us is not right for them. The definition of criminal insanity is when we cannot distinguish between right and wrong. Right flows from natural law. The laws of God are written on our hearts, and only He says what is right and wrong. And He has given this right judgment to us in the gift of counsel.
4. **FORTITUDE:** It is also known as courage. Do I have what it takes to be a martyr? We can show fortitude in lesser things (like keeping our Lenten fast), and as we cooperate with these lesser efforts, we can gather strength to cooperate with the bigger things. We bring life to this gift when we do not give in to the lesser things.
5. **KNOWLEDGE:** An awareness of God's revelation from Scripture, from Tradition, and from the Magisterium. As an example of this gift of knowledge, Deacon Jim spoke of St. Paul VI's encyclical "Humanae Vitae" where the pontiff displayed prophetic insights of what was to come with the widespread use of contraceptives condemned by the Church, and reinforced in this encyclical. At the time, the world was angered by his encyclical, but would have benefitted from embracing the profound truths it contained.
6. **PIETY:** Honoring God as God with the honor due God alone. In prayer, we see God for who He is and see us for who we are. We will grow in humility from the gift of piety. Even if we are deified, we will always look up to Him.
7. **FEAR OF THE LORD:** Deacon Jim shared with us the image of an obedient child who loves his parents so much he will do everything he can to never offend them. This is filial fear, the fear of the Lord. It is not a fear of punishment, and it comes out of love.

We all have intimate knowledge of these gifts because we are infused with them, and as we cooperate with them, they will grow and strengthen within us.

CONFIRMATION — Confirmation completes what was begun at baptism. The work of sanctification is completed. We become more and more Christ-like, God-like. This is God's gift. It matters not when we are baptized and confirmed, and some Eastern Churches confirm infants. Confirmation is NOT becoming an adult in the Church.

VIRTUE — Where is virtue in the Bible? Virtue is all over the scriptures, which laud the different manifestations of virtue in prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance. Deacon Jim began with a quote from the book of Wisdom (8:7). (See slide 23), which brings many of these manifestations together. He encouraged us to look up different translations of this passage.

A virtue is a continuous and stable disposition to the good. It is habitual good, an orientation to the good that is firm and fixed. James 2:14-17 (see slide 24) teaches us the importance of faith AND works. He says faith without works is dead. Or it is at least dormant in the soul. What good is this faith without works for those who need us? And what good is it to us? If we act virtuously towards those in need, then we are cooperating with those gifts then they grow in us, they strengthen us. There is no goodness if we do not cooperate. In order for there to be goodness, there has to be an act of virtue: This is a faith that lives, thrives and grows.

A life of virtue is a life of cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are bound together in love, so that whoever has [the theological virtue of] love has all the Gifts of the Spirit. If you do not have love, then the gifts of the Spirit will lie dormant in your soul. (Summa I, II, 68, 5). St. Paul tells us about the importance and the power of love in 1 Cor 13: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love I am a noisy gong... If I have all faith... but have not love, I am nothing. Love is patient, love is kind... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." The practice of a life of virtue is the key that unlocks the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. (Summa I, II, 65, 3). Our cooperation with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so essential for our deification, all depend on the virtue of love. Practice it and we will get stronger in it!

A LENTEN PERSPECTIVE — Deacon Jim concluded his talk by revisiting the 3 pillars of Lent powered by grace:

- **PRAYER:** Faith, hope, and love direct us to God
- **ALMSGIVING:** Faith without works is dead (James 2:17)
- **FASTING:** In fortitude, we deny ourselves so that we can turn to the Lord and our neighbor