

Perfected In Grace: At the Service of Communion

Deacon Jim Munno — 2024-03-14

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](#). Back in week 1, Deacon Jim encouraged us to be "selfish in prayer." We were hyper-focused on ourselves, looking inward, on God's gift of grace that we receive for our own benefit, for the work God is doing in us, for our deification. In this talk, we start looking outward again, on God's working in us for the benefit of others.

After a beautiful opening prayer focused on Romans 12:4-8 (one body, many parts), we continued with a brief overview of the series, and today's topic focused on charismatic gifts and the sacraments of service — holy orders and matrimony. We then had a review of the series so far, reminding us that everything begins with baptism. We begin the process of deification, and are incorporated into the Body of Christ (slide 5). By cooperating with the Holy Spirit, we live a life of virtue, most especially focusing on the preeminence of love, for as St. Thomas Aquinas reminds us: "If you do not have love, then the gifts of the Spirit will lie dormant in your soul," and "the practice of a life of virtue is the key that unlocks the gifts of the Holy Spirit" (slide 6). Deacon Jim reminded us of what St. Peter had said about becoming partakers of the divine nature so that "His divine power has granted to us ALL (emphasis added) things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pt 1:3-4). See slide 7 for the full quote. As fallen, sinful beings, we are all caught up in ourselves, we are self-serving, and focused on ourselves. However, in these verses, St. Peter is telling us there is an escape from these self-focused passions. Next, Deacon Jim reminded us of the chain of virtue from faith to love (slide 8). And finally, he reminded us of what it means to be perfected in grace, to be full of grace, not like Mary, but like we ourselves are meant to be perfected, what God has meant for each one of us to be. (slide 9). There is an inclination in us to be envious or sad if someone has a gift that we would like to have, or has a gift that is "better" than what we have. God is working on us so that all we do is delight in the good. If someone has something better than us, especially in grace, we must delight in the good, wherever it is, even in another! We take joy in the gift of the other, the graces they have that we do not — these are ALL gifts from God, given for the benefit of others.

MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT — Deacon Jim began today's talk with a long quote St. Paul: "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit" (1 Corinthians 12:4-8), (see slides 10-11 for the full quote). The opening quote from Romans talks of one body and many parts, as an image of the church. We need to exercise the gifts given to us! God chooses who gets which spiritual gifts, and God is always good, so everything directed at us from God is for OUR good, our maximum good — both what God gives us, and what God does not give us is out of love of us. Again, quoting from St. Paul in 1 Corinthians, Deacon Jim spoke of the gifts of service to others, the charisms, finally telling us to "Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts." And how do we strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts? By exercising virtue and responding to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And finally, St. Paul reminds us of the "more excellent way" and the importance of love (1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:3), (slides 13). Every grace, every charism, every virtue must be exercised in love.

SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION - HOLY ORDERS — Deacon Jim then discussed the the sacraments of holy orders and matrimony, the two sacraments directed towards the salvation of others. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), "if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so" (CCC 1534), (slide 15 for full quote from CCC).

"Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate. (CCC 1536). Only the bishops and priests are configured to Christ as priest, they can act "in persona Christi." The deacon is configured to Christ as servant, but not as priest. The redemptive sacrifice of Christ is unique, accomplished once for all, but it is made present in the Mass. Likewise, there is only one priesthood of Christ, that is made present through the ministerial priesthood (bishops and priests). (see slide 17 for details). All of those ordained to the episcopate and presbyterate share in the one priesthood of Christ.

Deacon Jim then spoke of the special lens of holy orders through which we can see all gifts. Every gift that we receive, that is at the service of others, is a sharing in Christ in a unique and special way. In theosis, God is sharing His very nature with us. He shares Himself with us and we are drawn into the Body of Christ. If some can comfort the sick, it is because they are bound to Christ Who could comfort the sick. If some can teach, it is because they are bound to Christ, the Teacher. If some can heal, it is because they are bound to Christ, the Healer. Every good thing, every virtue has its origin in God and is communicated to us through Jesus Christ. When we are caring for the elderly, when we are caring for the young, caring for the marginalized, we are doing it in, with and through Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit. This is the lens Deacon Jim wants us to look through when we see every spiritual gift that we have, and the exercise of that gift. Not only is it special that God would give us a divine capacity for good, but in the exercise of that good, we become more of exactly what He is making us into! And so we see these two great operations going on in us: Those gifts of the Spirit for our sanctification given to us for us, and those gifts of the Spirit given to us for others. All here is mystery and miracle, beyond our comprehension. The goodness and beauty in the mystery is awesome.

SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION - MATRIMONY — We do not see things as they truly are because of sin. But Christ sees things as they truly are, so when He says "this is My Body" referring to the Eucharist, He truly means it is HIS BODY. This mystery is no less true when He speaks about marriage and says "The two shall become one flesh" (Matt 19:3-6). See slide 19 for complete quote. They truly become one flesh. This statement is easily misunderstood. We do not fully understand, we do not see things as they truly are. We need to accept on faith what Jesus is telling us, what He knew to be true. The marriage bond is an absolute bond from God. The Catechism (1638, 1639) (slides 20, 21), speaks of the perpetual and exclusive nature of the marriage bond, and the fact that it is sealed by God Himself. The spouses are blessed and "are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament." The Catechism also speaks of authentic married love being caught up into divine love.

Deacon Jim then went on to quote the long, sometimes dangerous verses from Ephesians (5:21-33, slides 22,23) on the nuptial relationship between Christ and His Church as seen through the nuptial relationship of man and woman. Husband and wife must be subordinate to each other — the wife as Church to Christ, the husband as Christ to Church. St. Paul is talking about both Christ and His Church, and husband and wife. The vocation of Christian marriage is to image the mystical relationship between Christ and His Church. If in a Christian marriage, people look at the woman, they should see the Church, and if they look at the man, they should see Jesus' love for His Church. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom of the Church. The Church is the mystical Body of Christ. There is a oneness there. When the husband and wife become one, it is so they can model the Church. A Christian marriage is like the interior love of the trinity according to St. John Paul II. When Jesus is speaking of His relation to the Father in John 17, He is talking about the oneness of Himself and His Father — "that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:21). Jesus illuminates that oneness we have in joining this bond that matrimony reflects.

A final question — do women have the lower hand here? If we look at Genesis 2:18: "The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him." '**Helper**' is often rewritten as 'partner' but this is in fact a great demotion! The Hebrew *ēzer* (helper) is used mostly to refer to God's help to His people. The word has the context of divine helper. Woman is to be to man as God is to His people. In Ephesians 5, the husband is to the wife as Christ is to His Church, in other words, as God is to His people. And all the way in the beginning of Genesis, we see that woman is to be to man as God is to be to His people. Each of them, the complementary, not the opposing, sexes are made for each other. Each to be as God is to His people for the other.

A LENTEN PERSPECTIVE — Deacon Jim concluded his talk by once again revisiting the three pillars of Lent powered by Grace.

- Prayer – Pray for the grace to serve others.
- Almsgiving – Give of ourself to others. After all, we are full of charisms whether we know it or not.
- Fasting – Self-mortification at the service of others (cheerfully). Fasting is dying to self, so we can care for others using our gifts for our own good and the good of others.